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GREATEST BATTLES OF WW2

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

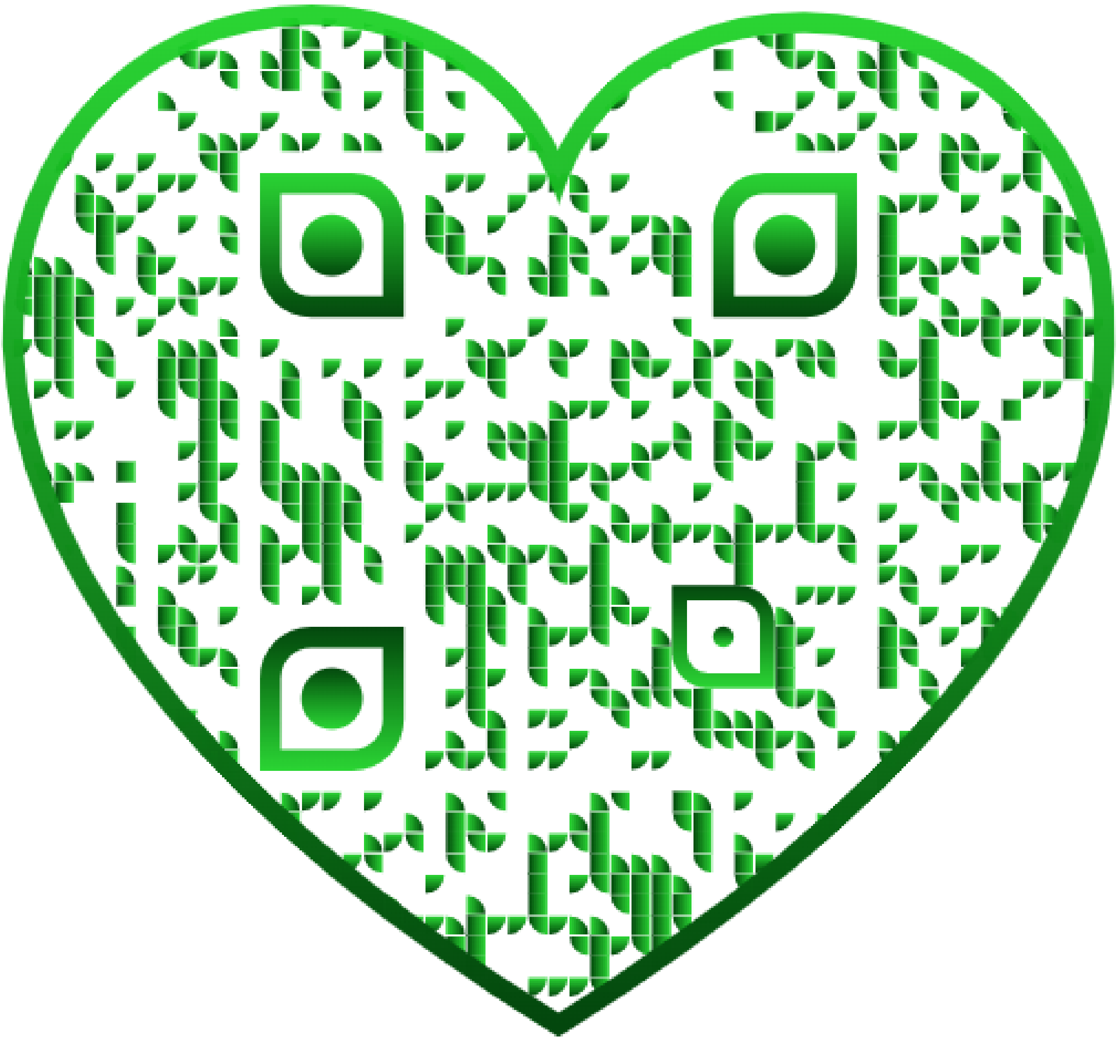
Spitfires proved a nightmare for Göring's Luftwaffe.

MONTE CASSINO

Battle for Italy's pivotal mountain peak raged for 122 days.

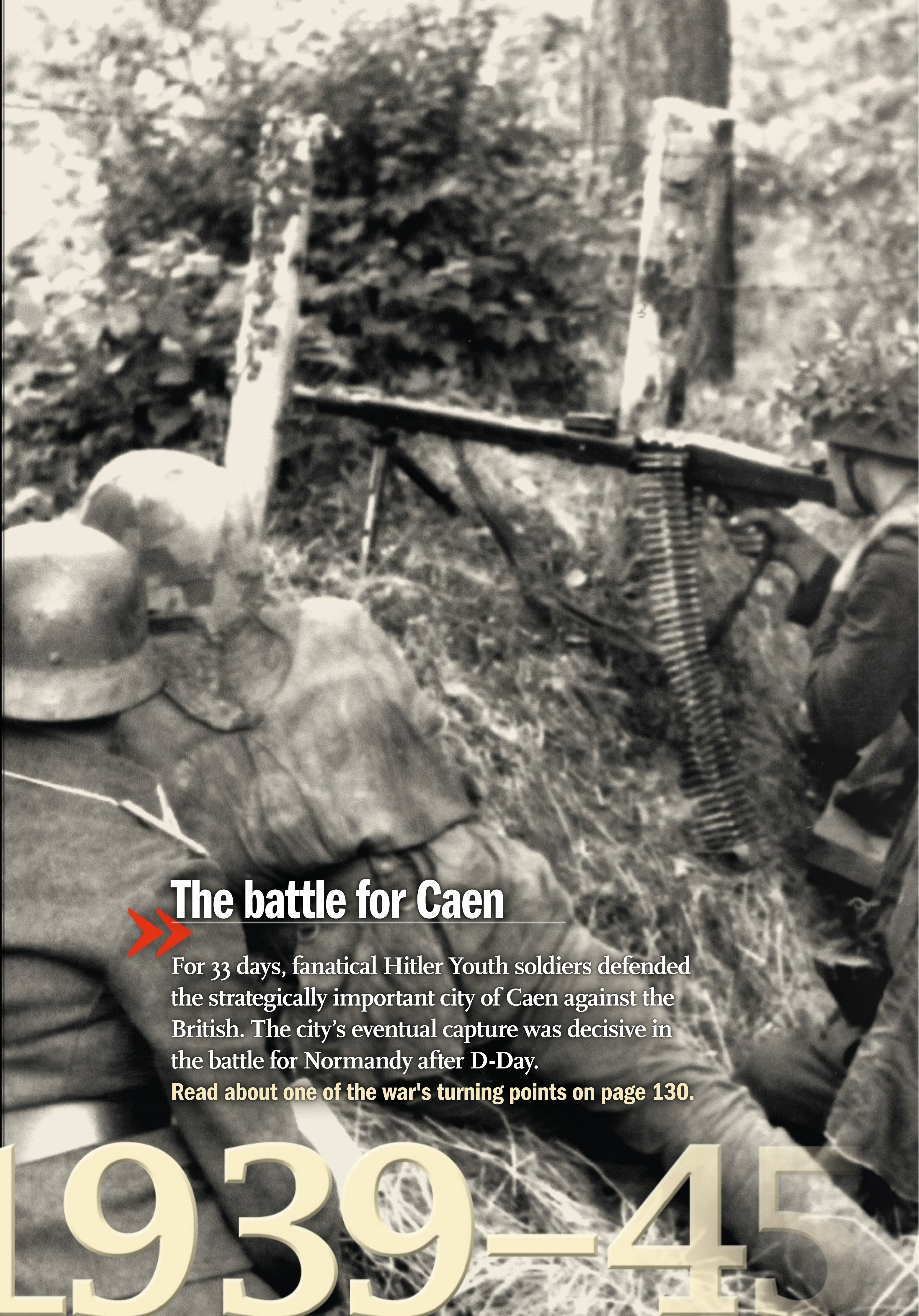
THE HUNT FOR BISMARCK

Royal Navy used all its resources to sink Germany's most powerful warship.



The war's biggest battles

World War II was felt across the globe. In Asia, Europe, Africa, North America, South America and near the Arctic Circle, battles raged between Germans, Japanese, Soviets, Americans and British – plus all their allies. Whether on sea, land or in the air, sailors, soldiers and pilots fought for the upper hand and the decisive victories that could turn the tide of war. The Allies struggled during the first three years of WWII, but eventually the Royal Navy defeated Hitler's U-boats, Montgomery kicked Rommel out of Africa, the US turned the tide in the Pacific and daring pilots defeated the Luftwaffe across all fronts. Victories were won using tactical acumen, new technology and human courage, and in the biggest battles of the war their triumphs ultimately secured victory for the Allies.

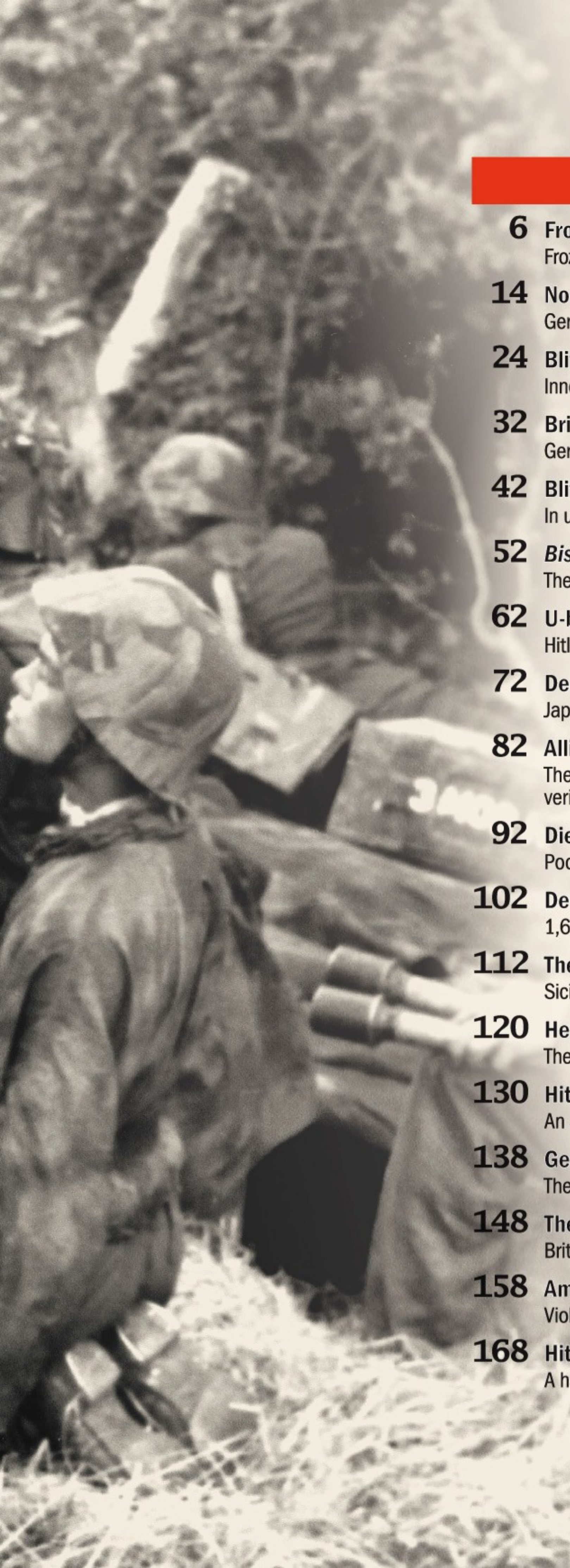


The battle for Caen

For 33 days, fanatical Hitler Youth soldiers defended the strategically important city of Caen against the British. The city's eventual capture was decisive in the battle for Normandy after D-Day.

Read about one of the war's turning points on page 130.

1939–45



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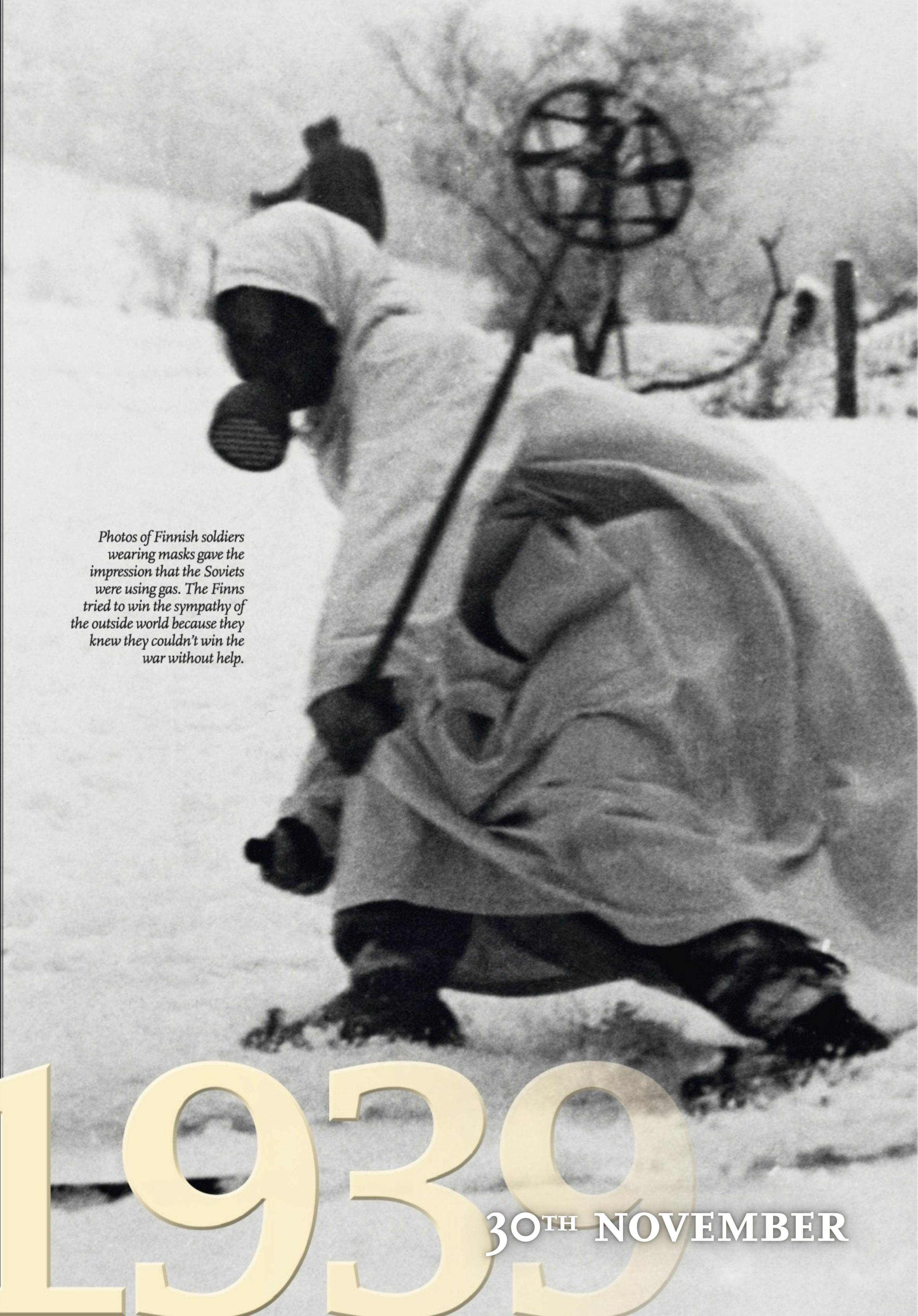
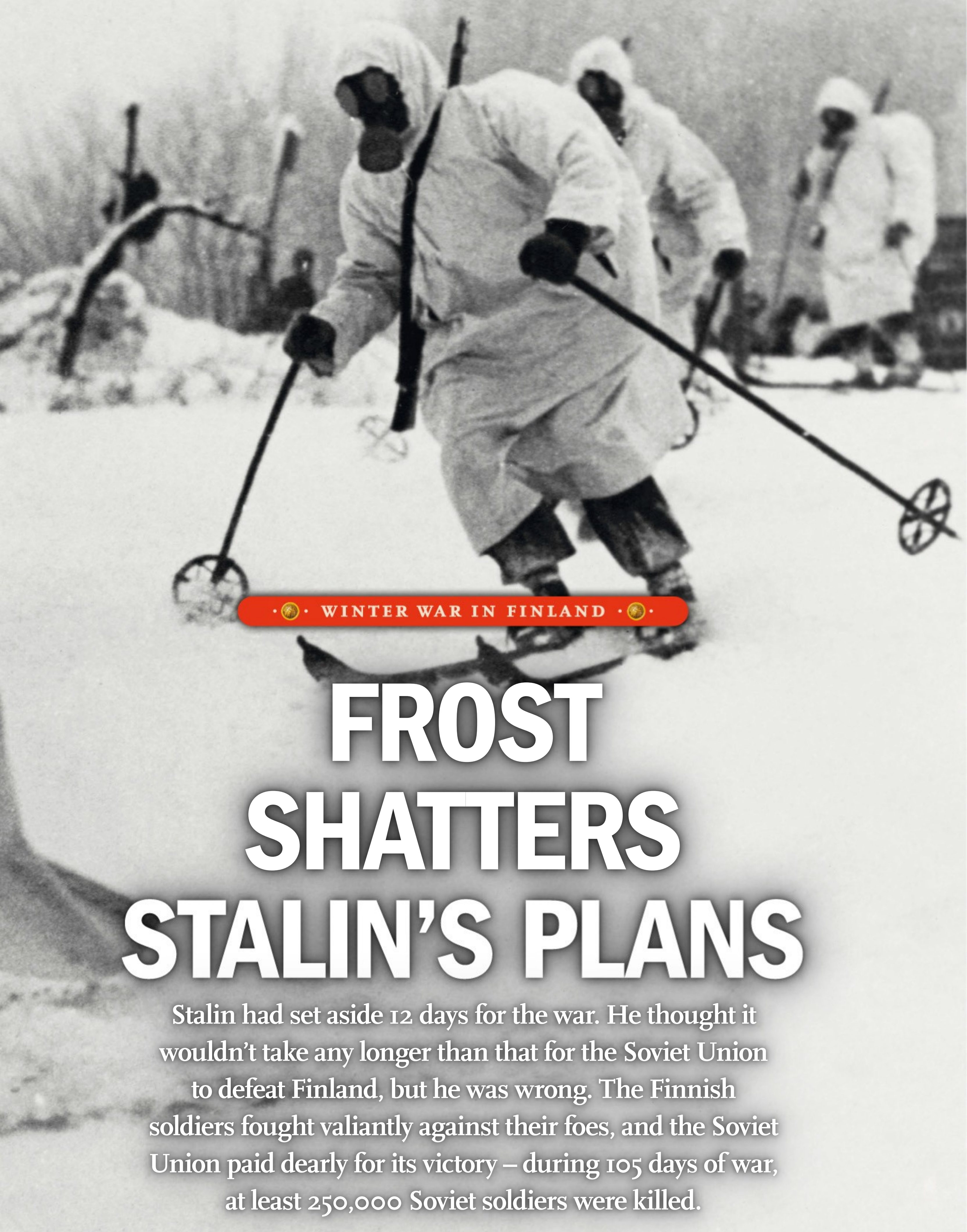


Photos of Finnish soldiers wearing masks gave the impression that the Soviets were using gas. The Finns tried to win the sympathy of the outside world because they knew they couldn't win the war without help.

1939

30TH NOVEMBER



WINTER WAR IN FINLAND

FROST SHATTERS STALIN'S PLANS

Stalin had set aside 12 days for the war. He thought it wouldn't take any longer than that for the Soviet Union to defeat Finland, but he was wrong. The Finnish soldiers fought valiantly against their foes, and the Soviet Union paid dearly for its victory – during 105 days of war, at least 250,000 Soviet soldiers were killed.

THE STAGE IS SET

FINLAND
Helsinki

It had been a long road to independence. Finland had once belonged to Sweden, but was ceded to Russia in 1809. It finally succeeded in becoming independent in 1917 following the revolution in Russia. Now Stalin is making territorial demands, but the Finns won't give up their hard-won freedom without a fight.

THE PALE MORNING SUN hung low over Helsinki on 30th November 1939. Without warning, nine Soviet bombers emerged from the clouds and began an unscheduled flight over Finland's capital. Above the harbour, one aircraft dropped its payload without hitting a single ship. The planes then continued towards the town centre, probably intending to bomb the main train station, but they missed. All the bombs fell on the central square, killing 40 people.

Straight after, the planes spread out. Some bombed the airport – but only hit a hangar – others attacked the city's technical college, where students and teachers lost their lives. The Soviets flew back and forth dropping their last bombs. A few planes reached a residential neighbourhood, before the aircraft regrouped and disappeared to the east.

Only then did the city's air-raid siren go off. But the noise of the sirens merely confirmed that Finland was at war with its mighty neighbour to the east, the Soviet Union. Four hours later, the Soviets returned with 15 bombers. In total, 91 of Helsinki's inhabitants perished that day.

A car wound its way through the chaos. In the passenger seat was the country's defence chief, Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim. It should have been his last day on the job – he was unhappy with the government, and had sought to leave. Mannerheim wanted a bigger military budget, but was refused. He'd recommended a more lenient policy towards Stalin, but his plan was rejected. Now everyone knew that the Finnish-Swedish aristocrat was the person to save Finland.

3.7 million people lived in Finland in 1939. The small country was up against the Soviet Union, which had a population of around 170 million.

On the first day of the Winter War, Helsinki was attacked twice by Soviet bombers – 91 people were killed.

Desire to protect Leningrad

The conflict with the USSR had been going on for several years, and on 18th October 1939, Josef Stalin had put his demands on the table: Finland must abandon the Karelian Isthmus, destroy its defences to the east, and allow a Soviet naval base on the Hanko Peninsula. This would give the Soviet industrial city of Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) more of a buffer against possible military attacks.

The Finns rejected Stalin's demands and assured him that Leningrad had nothing to fear, because no foreign power would be allowed to use Finnish territory for an attack.

The Finns suspected that Stalin's demands were just the first in a long line that would culminate in their country being swallowed up by the Soviet Union. But in Moscow, Stalin couldn't understand how the little country could be so confident. He became suspicious and assumed the Finns must have made secret deals with enemies of the Soviet Union. He decided to take the Finnish territories by force.

He appointed Marshal Kirill Meretskov, Leningrad's military commander, as head of the invading army.

Finnish forces to be smashed

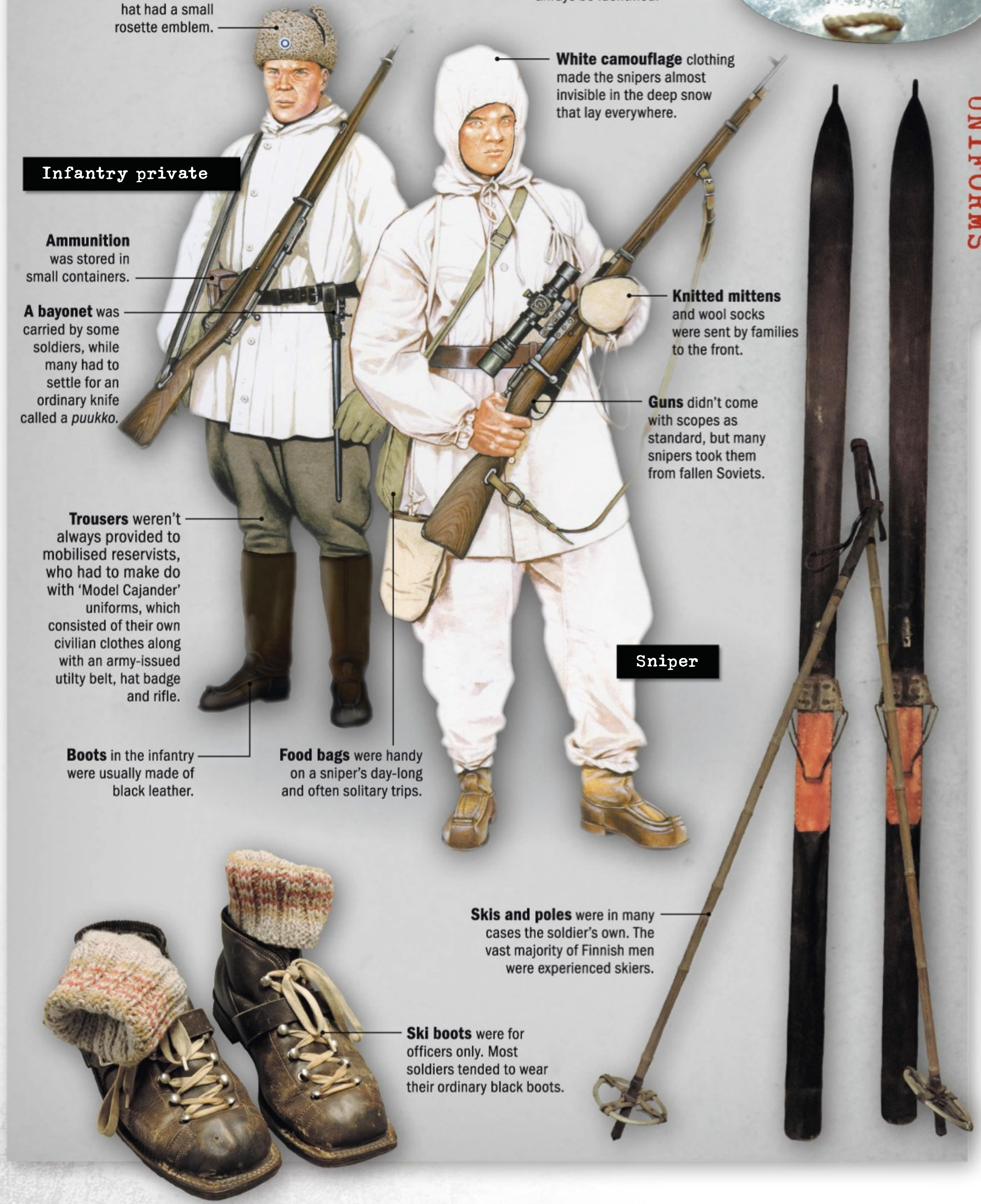
On the night of 30th November, all the preparations had been completed. Meretskov commanded his mighty army into battle: "Comrades, soldiers of the Red Army, officers, commissars and political workers! To fulfil the Soviet government's and our great Fatherland's will, I hereby order: the troops in Leningrad Military District are to march over the frontier, crush the Finnish forces, and once and for all secure the Soviet Union's north-western borders and Lenin's city, the crib of the revolution of the proletariat."

Over the 1,000 km border – from the Barents Sea in the north to the Baltic Sea in the south – Meretskov's armies rolled into Finland. He had 500,000 soldiers, three times more than the Finns. Meretskov also had

Soldiers lacked equipment

The Finnish army didn't have enough clothing and equipment for every soldier when the war broke out in autumn 1939. Many had to bring their own skis and winter gear.

Identity tags ensured that fallen soldiers could always be identified.



Fur hat protected against the cold. The hat had a small rosette emblem.

White camouflage clothing made the snipers almost invisible in the deep snow that lay everywhere.

Ammunition was stored in small containers.

A bayonet was carried by some soldiers, while many had to settle for an ordinary knife called a *puukko.*

Knitted mittens and wool socks were sent by families to the front.

Guns didn't come with scopes as standard, but many snipers took them from fallen Soviets.

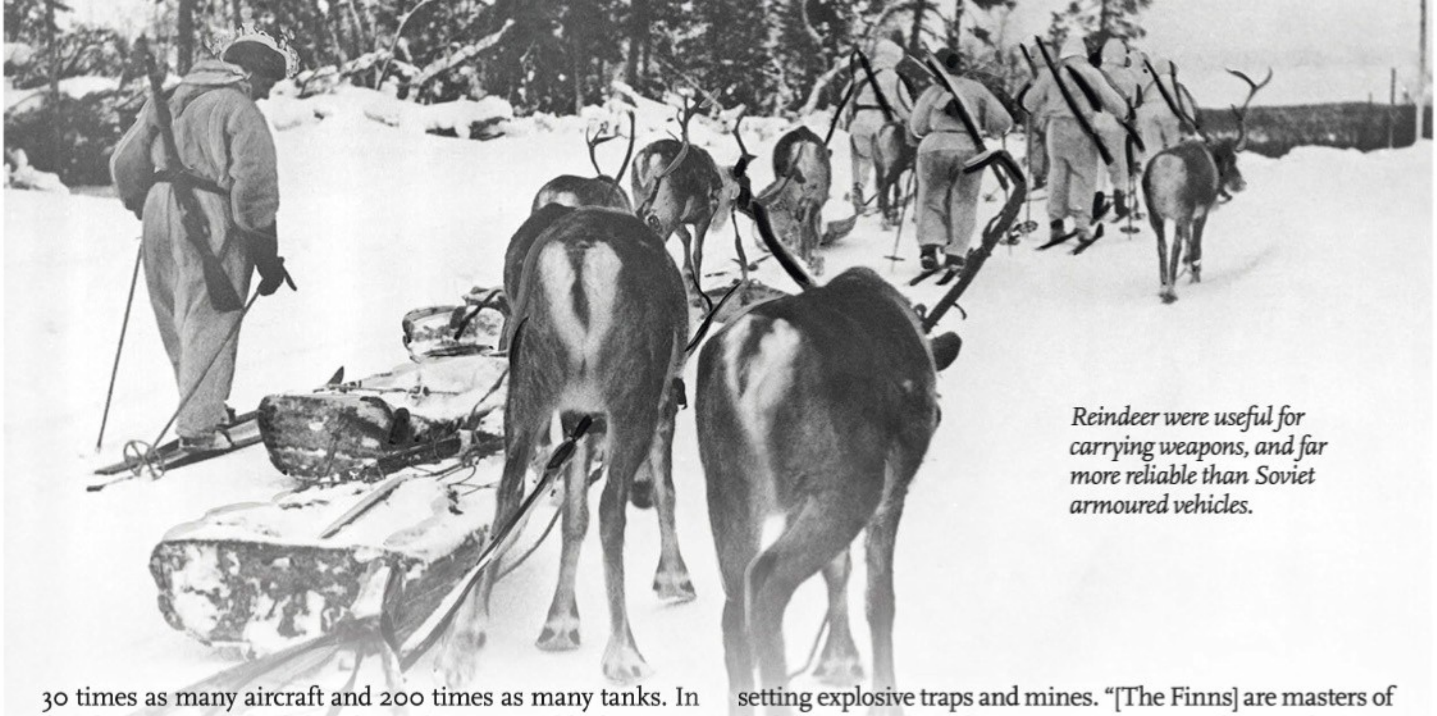
Trousers weren't always provided to mobilised reservists, who had to make do with 'Model Cajander' uniforms, which consisted of their own civilian clothes along with an army-issued utilty belt, hat badge and rifle.

Boots in the infantry were usually made of black leather.

Food bags were handy on a sniper's day-long and often solitary trips.

Skis and poles were in many cases the soldier's own. The vast majority of Finnish men were experienced skiers.

Ski boots were for officers only. Most soldiers tended to wear their ordinary black boots.



Reindeer were useful for carrying weapons, and far more reliable than Soviet armoured vehicles.

30 times as many aircraft and 200 times as many tanks. In fact, he was concerned that the Red Army would advance so quickly that it might forget to stop before it got to Sweden. Over the border, Mannerheim urged his men: "Brave soldiers of Finland! I enter on this task at a time when our hereditary enemy is again attacking our country. Confidence in one's commander is the first condition for success."

Confidence was the only thing he had – as a former officer in the Imperial Russian Army, he knew the art of war, but he lacked just about everything else. Most of the Finns' weapons pre-dated the Russian Revolution in 1917, and they only had enough ammunition to last for a few weeks.

Mannerheim knew that Finland would never be able to win the war. He could only hope to delay the Soviet invasion long enough for the outside world to rush to the Finns' aid. His first priority, therefore, was to prevent the Red Army crossing the Karelian Isthmus and reaching the capital, Helsinki. He could sacrifice virtually everywhere else.

RED ARMY ADVANCED

Meretskov's soldiers made rapid progress. Petsamo, on the Barents Sea, fell on the first day, and the Red Army met no resistance in the northern forests. The mere sight of a Soviet tank scared the Finns. Unhindered, the Soviets advanced.

To the south, on the Karelian Isthmus, the Finns put on a show of resistance, destroying wells, burning houses, and setting explosive traps and mines. "[The Finns] are masters of foul play," complained a Soviet war correspondent. "When our tired men wanted to drink, they found all the village wells filled with earth. Our enemies are perfidious [and] cowardly… Hardly had the first Red fighter set foot on Finnish soil when an explosion rent the air. Mines are everywhere."

It took a week to cover the 30 kilometres to the main defensive position, the Mannerheim Line, which acted as a barrier across the Karelian Isthmus. Here, the offensive stalled in the face of dogged Finn resistance.

ACTION GAVE CONFIDENCE

Mannerheim's tactics worked, but a week's retreat had worn away the forces' morale. And Mannerheim was annoyed that the soldiers in the north were giving up so quickly. In order to strengthen his defence, he ordered action against the Soviet forces at Tolvajärvi, north of Lake Ladoga.

Under cover of night, 140 Finnish soldiers skied to a Soviet camp. The Soviets had lit huge bonfires to keep warm – and thus were perfectly lit targets. The Finns spread out on the crest of a hill. Without a sound, they slipped down through the camp, killed everyone. The attack spooked others in the Soviet camps, who began to shoot wildly in the dark. Very soon, the Soviet soldiers were fighting one another, while the Finns snuck away as invisibly as they'd arrived.

It was a total victory. Tolvajärvi convinced the Finns that they could easily take on the fight against their mighty enemy when they used their experience of surviving in the Finnish landscape to their advantage.

ARMY EQUIPPED FOR WRONG WAR

The Soviets underestimated nature as an adversary. The soldiers had been sent out in the subarctic winter in olive-green summer uniforms, which provided neither warmth nor camouflage.

Few soldiers had winter boots, and hardly anyone could ski, which meant the Soviets and their heavy equipment were unable to move through the forests, where the snow was deep. Instead, the soldiers had stick to the roads, transforming the army into slow-moving columns, which were 20, 30 or 40 km long.

The Finnish soldiers, in their white overalls, could ski right up to the columns,

1867-1951

NAME **GUSTAF MANNERHEIM**

TITLE FIELD MARSHAL

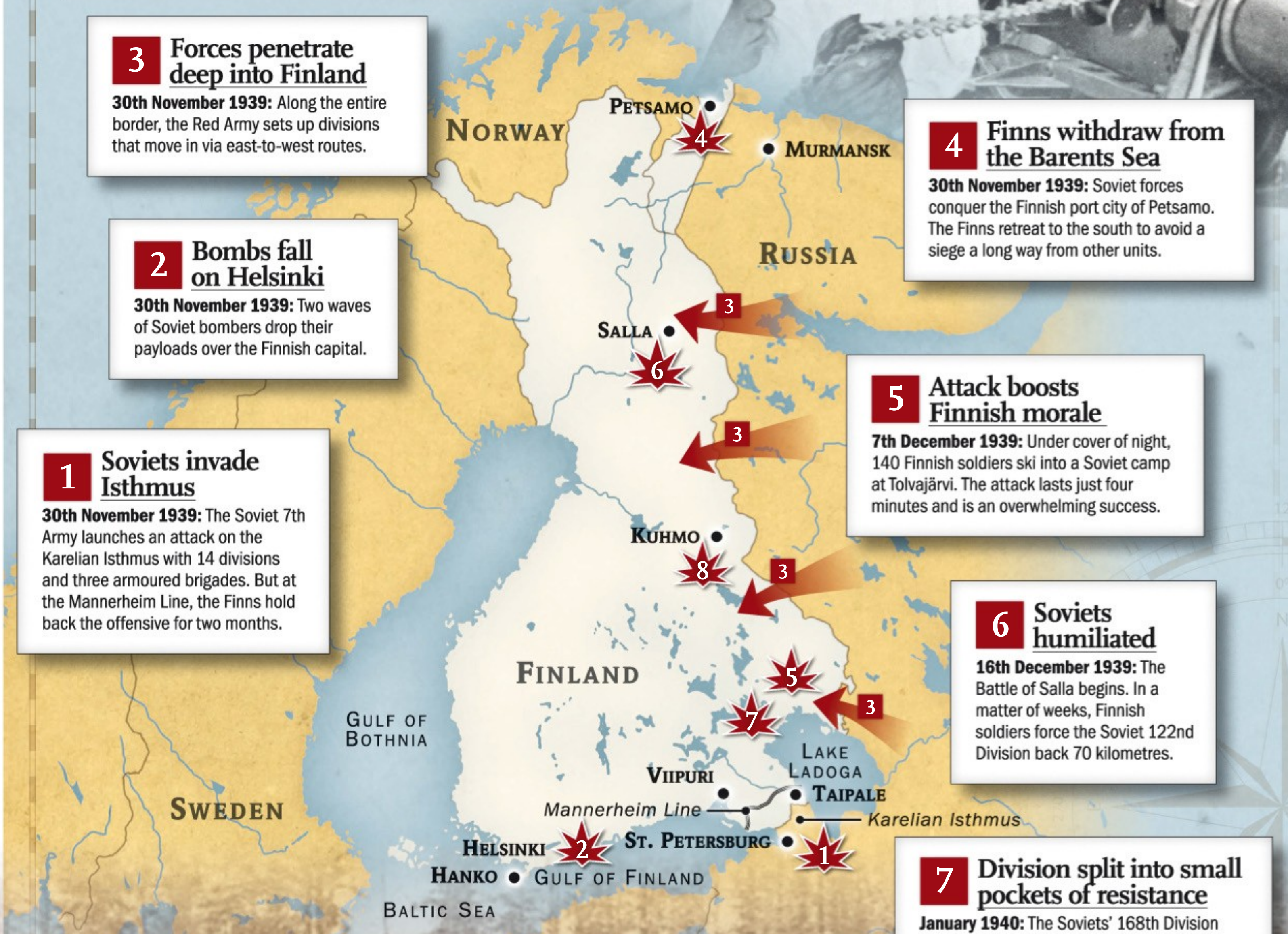
Finland's best man

Finnish-Swedish aristocrat Gustaf Mannerheim made a career as a young man in the Imperial Russian Army, when Finland was part of Russia. In 1917, he left home and lead Finland's struggle for freedom. Mannerheim was about to retire when the Winter War broke out, but stayed to lead the defence. He also managed a brief stint as the country's president.

- **Appointed field marshal in 1933.**
- **President of Finland 1944-46.**

105 days of battle in deep snow and biting cold

The outcome of the war seemed certain: a huge and well-equipped Soviet army against poorly armed Finns. But the cold and local knowledge played crucial roles.



3 Forces penetrate deep into Finland

30th November 1939: Along the entire border, the Red Army sets up divisions that move in via east-to-west routes.

2 Bombs fall on Helsinki

30th November 1939: Two waves of Soviet bombers drop their payloads over the Finnish capital.

1 Soviets invade Isthmus

30th November 1939: The Soviet 7th Army launches an attack on the Karelian Isthmus with 14 divisions and three armoured brigades. But at the Mannerheim Line, the Finns hold back the offensive for two months.

4 Finns withdraw from the Barents Sea

30th November 1939: Soviet forces conquer the Finnish port city of Petsamo. The Finns retreat to the south to avoid a siege a long way from other units.

5 Attack boosts Finnish morale

7th December 1939: Under cover of night, 140 Finnish soldiers ski into a Soviet camp at Tolvajärvi. The attack lasts just four minutes and is an overwhelming success.

6 Soviets humiliated

16th December 1939: The Battle of Salla begins. In a matter of weeks, Finnish soldiers force the Soviet 122nd Division back 70 kilometres.

7 Division split into small pockets of resistance

January 1940: The Soviets' 168th Division goes north around Lake Ladoga to reach the Mannerheim Line from behind. But the Finns resist the attack by splitting the division into 11 small pockets, which are gradually defeated.

8 The Red Army is captured at Kuhmo

28th January 1940: Finnish border soldiers surround the Soviet 54th Division and divide it into three groups. Until the ceasefire in March, the Soviets are forced to survive on air-dropped supplies.

The poorly provisioned Finnish army picked up lots of military equipment left behind by Soviet soldiers on the battlefield.

ARMY OF FINLAND

SOLDIERS: 180,000 men
■ Of those, 130,000 stood at the Mannerheim Line.
✝ 26,000 soldiers were killed.

TANKS: 32

AIRCRAFT: 114

SOVIET ARMY

SOLDIERS: 425,000 men
■ *In February 1940, the figure hit 998,000 soldiers.*
✝ *At least 250,000 killed.*

TANKS: 6,500

AIRCRAFT: 3,880

The Finnish soldiers wore white suits, which made them almost invisible in the snow.

KESKI
1939–1940

sneak between trucks and tanks, launch grenades or Molotov cocktails, and be gone within seconds. A column could be halted by a few felled trees – and if tanks at the front were set on fire, the column was paralysed for hours.

Meretskov's offensive was hampered in most of Finland because his troops were equipped for a different type of war – a lightning war in open, central-European terrain.

Finns wiped out two divisions

It was worse for the Soviet 44th and 163rd Divisions, which were crossing Finland. The goal was the Gulf of Bothnia. If the attackers could reach that far, they'd be able to cut the country in half and block the Finnish border with Sweden.

Another decisive battle began, and Mannerheim had to rely on the resourceful colonel Hjalmar Siilasvuo, who was in command of 17,000 well-armed Finnish soldiers.

Before the 163rd reached the logging town of Suomussalmi, the Finns burned down the houses. Then they blocked all the roads out of town, so the division was trapped and siege warfare could ensue.

Meanwhile, the 44th Division was approaching Suomussalmi from the south-east with fresh supplies for their trapped comrades. The Finns stopped the division's advance with felled tree trunks and repeated attacks on the flanks of the 40-kilometre column. Then the Finns were left to fight the 163rd.

13 percent of Finland's territory was lost after the surrender in 1940. Over 400,000 Finns were evacuated from areas ceded to the Soviets.

On 28th December, the scattered survivors of the 163rd made their way on foot through the forests to the east. Back in Suomussalmi, lots of Soviet equipment was left behind – tanks, artillery, trucks and ammunition – that Hjalmar Siilasvuo could use to fight the 44th Division.

The cold, weary Soviet soldiers had abandoned any thoughts of an offensive. Instead, they spent their waking hours staring into the snow-covered forest, where death lurked in the form of snipers. Again and again, Finnish soldiers on skis swooped along the column. They threw grenades or Molotov cocktails at the tanks and shot at anyone they saw.

The Finns targeted the division's huge field kitchens, which drew attention to their position with their thick clouds of smoke. Kitchen after kitchen was destroyed, and more and more soldiers had to cope with the biting, minus-40-degree cold without hot food.

The Finns succeeded in breaking the long Soviet column up into small pockets of resistance, which they called *motti* – a logger's term for small stacks of firewood that would be chopped up later. Slowly, the *mottis* died from hunger, cold and frequent Finnish attacks.

On 6th January 1940, the situation was so desperate that the commander of the 44th Division told his troops that it was now every man for himself. The result was panic. Fleeing soldiers trampled each other to death, with only 700 men escaping through the woods.

Soldiers were invisible

Historians estimate that more than 25,000 of the 48,000 Soviet soldiers involved in the Battle of Raate Road perished – 30 times as many as the Finns lost. And the fleeing soldiers left behind a huge amount of war booty – 65 tanks, 400 trucks, 6,000 rifles, nearly 300 machine guns and mountains of ammunition. Immediately after their victory, the Finns began questioning the Soviet soldiers who had been captured. Why didn't they try to break out?

"Of course we tried to attack and open the road forward, but it was like banging your head against a wall," a chain-smoking Soviet officer told the Finnish interpreter. "We couldn't see the Finns anywhere. And believe it or not, the first Finns that I personally saw were the two that took me prisoner... We couldn't see them anywhere, yet they were all over the place. If anyone left the camp, he met with certain death."

The inept general of the 44th fled back to the Soviet Union, where he was court martialled. The charge read "the loss of 55 field kitchens". He was found guilty and immediately shot.

Stalin scolded commanders

Among the Soviet leadership, nerves were on edge. The nation was a laughing stock and its sovereignty threatened, as

Simo Häyhä was a small, quiet, tough man from the Finnish forests. As a sniper, he killed 542 Soviets before being wounded himself.

FACTS

WHITE DEATH IN THE FOREST

- Snipers were one of the Finns' most effective weapons against the Soviets.
- The marksmen mainly targeted officers, but other ranks weren't safe either.
- Many snipers were armed with Soviet weapons taken from the battlefield.
- The Soviets called the sniper Simo Häyhä *Belaja Smert* – White Death.

This medal was given to Finnish soldiers who had participated in the defence of the Karelian Isthmus.

Stalin told his generals: "The authority of the Red Army is the guarantee of the USSR's national security. If we struggle for a long time against such a weak opponent, this will stimulate the anti-Soviet forces of the imperialists."

The Soviet people were being fed propaganda to explain why the invincible Red Army was being humiliated in Finland; the weather and the harsh landscape were just two of the excuses. It was also claimed that the United States had deployed its thousand best pilots and that the Mannerheim Line was even stronger than the famous French Maginot Line at the German border.

The truth was that the Finnish defences, with approximately 100 fortifications of concrete and timber, were quite primitive. The fortifications were so far apart that a massed Soviet tank attack could have passed between them. Meretskov just didn't realise it.

At Christmas, Stalin replaced the useless field marshal with his old friend and veteran of the 1917 revolution, Semyon Timoshenko.

The new commander realised that Meretskov's tactics were wrong. Instead of trying to capture the vast northern Finnish forests, effort should have been concentrated on the Karelian Isthmus – the bridge to Helsinki.

In January, Timoshenko sent almost half a million fresh troops to the area. The Mannerheim Line had to be pulverised. The new tactic was not elegant, but it was effective, particularly as Stalin needed decisive action before France and Britain sent forces to help Finland.

THE STORM BEGAN

On 1st February, hell broke out on the Karelian Isthmus. Hour after hour, Soviet guns shelled the Finnish positions, while bombers darkened the sky above. Over the following days, the deadly fire intensified. The ground was churned up several metres deep, and heavy concrete bunkers shook to their foundations.

Not since the German attack on Verdun in 1916 had the world seen such an intense bombardment. The Finns couldn't put up much of a resistance. Although the enemy positions were obvious, the Finns had limited heavy artillery and its use was rationed. Instead, they had to hide until the enemy was close enough to be defeated with lighter weaponry.

The Finnish soldiers didn't even dare to light bonfires, because the smoke would immediately attract the attention of Soviet artillery. For the first time in the war, the Finns froze and starved. With desperate courage, they held their positions for 12 days. Then the Soviets broke through the Mannerheim Line and were finally able to continue their offensive after a two-and-a-half month delay.

The Finns had to retreat to makeshift defences, hastily erected a few miles to the west, but they didn't last long, and Timoshenko was finally able to take Viipuri (now part of Russia and known as Vyborg).

The last desperate hope of foreign aid was extinguished. The help never came, and Finland was forced to make peace with the Soviets on 12th March 1940. The agreement gave Stalin 57,000 square kilometres of Finnish territory.

"We seem to have won just enough land to bury our dead," a Soviet general dryly noted.

PERSPECTIVE

Finland sought revenge

The year after the Winter War, Finland started a new conflict to win back its lost territory in the wake of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union.

WINTER WAR After the 105-day Winter War, Stalin forced Finland to relinquish 13 percent of its land. Among the lost territory was the Karelian Isthmus, including the country's second-largest city, Viipuri, and several large industrial areas. Some areas to the north and small islands were also lost.

26,000	Finnish soldiers died during the Winter War.
250,000	Soviet soldiers lost their lives, many to Finnish snipers.

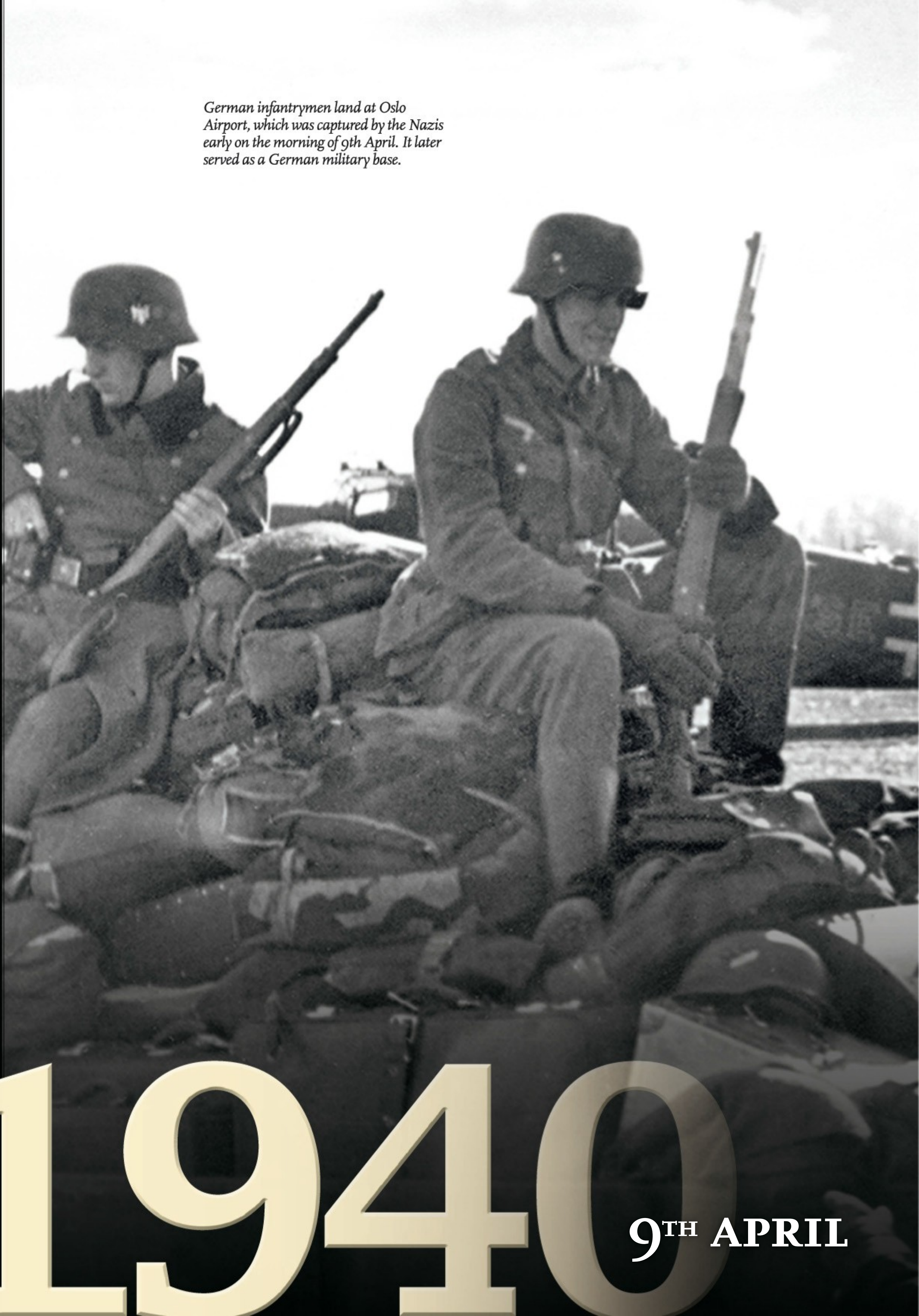
CONTINUATION WAR Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union enabled Finland to reclaim its lost territories. The so-called Continuation War was successful while Germany was doing well, but in 1944, Finland was forced to make peace.

59,000	Finns died, with the front not advancing at all for long periods.
200,000	Soviets fell, partly because Germany was arming the Finns.

LAPLAND WAR The condition for renewed peace with the Soviets in 1944 was that the borders were pushed back to where they'd been after the Winter War. The Finns also had to fight Germans in the north of the country in the Lapland War.

1,000	Finns had to sacrifice their lives to defeat the Germans.
2,000	Germans perished from September 1944 to April 1945.

After the Winter War, over 400,000 Finns were forced to leave their homes in haste because the areas were to be surrendered to the Soviet Union.



German infantrymen land at Oslo Airport, which was captured by the Nazis early on the morning of 9th April. It later served as a German military base.

1940

9TH APRIL

BATTLE FOR NARVIK

NORWAY FALLS

In 1940, Hitler decided to test the Allies' strength during the invasion of Norway. However, after a month of hard fighting in and around the crucial port city of Narvik, the Germans were ready to admit defeat and retreat home through Sweden, but then the Allies did something unexpected…

Scandinavia 1940

THE STAGE IS SET

Narvik
NORWAY
Oslo
Copenhagen
DENMARK

The Nazis believe that Britain's sea blockade was one of the reasons Germany lost World War I. Free access to the North Atlantic is crucial if history isn't to repeat itself. Norway seems to be the key: if captured, its fjords could be used for U-boat bases while control of Narvik would secure the iron ore supply from Sweden.

On 9th April 1940, the armoured ships *Eidsvold* and *Norge* lay at anchor off Narvik. They were Norway's strongest warships – but also the oldest employed by any of the world's navies.

All at once, a slender, grey vessel slipped out of the darkness. Then another, and more followed. A total of ten state-of-the-art German destroyers sailed across the Ofotfjord towards Narvik, directly opposite the two old armoured colossuses.

The German flagship *Heidkamp* sent a boat across to *Eidsvold*. The Germans were friends, the newcomers claimed. They urged the Norwegians to stand down, but *Eidsvold's* captain, Odd Willoch, wasn't fooled and sent the German party on its way. As the German boat headed back, it sent up a red flare indicating the Norwegians planned to resist.

Willoch knew what was coming next:

"Now we are going to fight, boys," he shouted.

The old armoured ship slowly turned towards the German destroyer, increasing its speed. But before *Eidsvold* could approach ramming speed, three German torpedoes hit the Norwegian ship. Two did little damage, but the third found its mark near the forward magazine, which exploded, tearing the hull apart. *Eidsvold* sank in just 15 seconds. 175 sailors out of the 183 that made up the ship's crew died in the icy water.

The explosion was heard on the armoured ship *Norge*. From the deck, her crew watched unknown ships emerge from the fog, then *Norge* opened fire. None of the shells struck, but two torpedoes from the German destroyer *Arnim* hit *Norge* amidships. One minute later, *Norge* had joined *Eidsvold*, disappearing from the surface with 101 sailors.

With the sinking of the armoured ships, Narvik's naval resistance was over. The commander-in-chief of the city's defence was Colonel Konrad Sundlo – a member of *Nasjonal Samling*, a Nazi-style party in Norway's National Assembly. He dithered for half-an-hour without attacking, which gave the Germans plenty of time to gain control of the port city.

The Germans entered Narvik without a shot being fired, and *Heidkamp's* commander, Friedrich Bonte, was pleased to note that his part in the large-scale operation codenamed

Weserübung was complete: Narvik – the port that was vital for transporting Swedish iron ore to Germany – was secure.

The attack came as a surprise

In the weeks before Operation Weserübung, rumours of an imminent German attack circulated, but no one had taken them seriously. Even when the largest German naval force ever assembled left northern Germany on the night of 7th April, neither the Scandinavians nor the Allies had any idea what was about to happen. Was it an attack on Iceland? Murmansk? Or just an exercise? The guesses were all way off the mark.

At 04.15 on 9th April, the Germans attacked a number of strategically important cities, port facilities and bridges in Denmark and Norway. The surprise was total. In just four hours, Germany had forced Denmark to surrender and declare itself willing to cooperate with the new occupying power.

> **“Against whom?”**
>
> King Håkon’s reaction when he was awakened and informed that Norway was at war.

The Nazis were hoping for a similar outcome in Norway, but instead of negotiating, King Håkon and his government fled to Oslo and mobilised the army.

General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, the commander of the giant Operation Weserübung, knew that a fight was now unavoidable. Norway had to be taken, valley by valley, until its inhabitants realised the futility of the situation.

The Norwegians defended staunchly, but their options were limited. The soldiers lacked both training and equipment. The country wasn’t prepared for an invasion. The troops’ only hope was that the Allies would come to Norway’s rescue – which, after some disagreement, they were on their way to do.

The Allies prepare for action

On 14th April, the first British troops landed in the Harstad region, north of Narvik, where they set up a temporary base. The soldiers had no artillery or anti-aircraft guns. Nor were they prepared for the Norwegian conditions, having neither warm clothes, snowshoes nor skis. When the Royal Navy’s Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cork went ashore to assess the situation, he sank so deeply into the snow that his men had to pull him out. In his report he wrote:

“I have personally tested [the snow]... and found it easy to sink to one’s waist and to make, any progress was exhausting.”

Despite the problems, it was decided to try and force a landing at Narvik on 24th April, but the action ended in chaos. On the day of the offensive, a violent blizzard struck. The British battleships fired several salvos, but couldn’t see where their shells were landing because of the blinding snow. The British had no choice but to abort the landing – which was just as well as their shells had done little damage to the German positions.

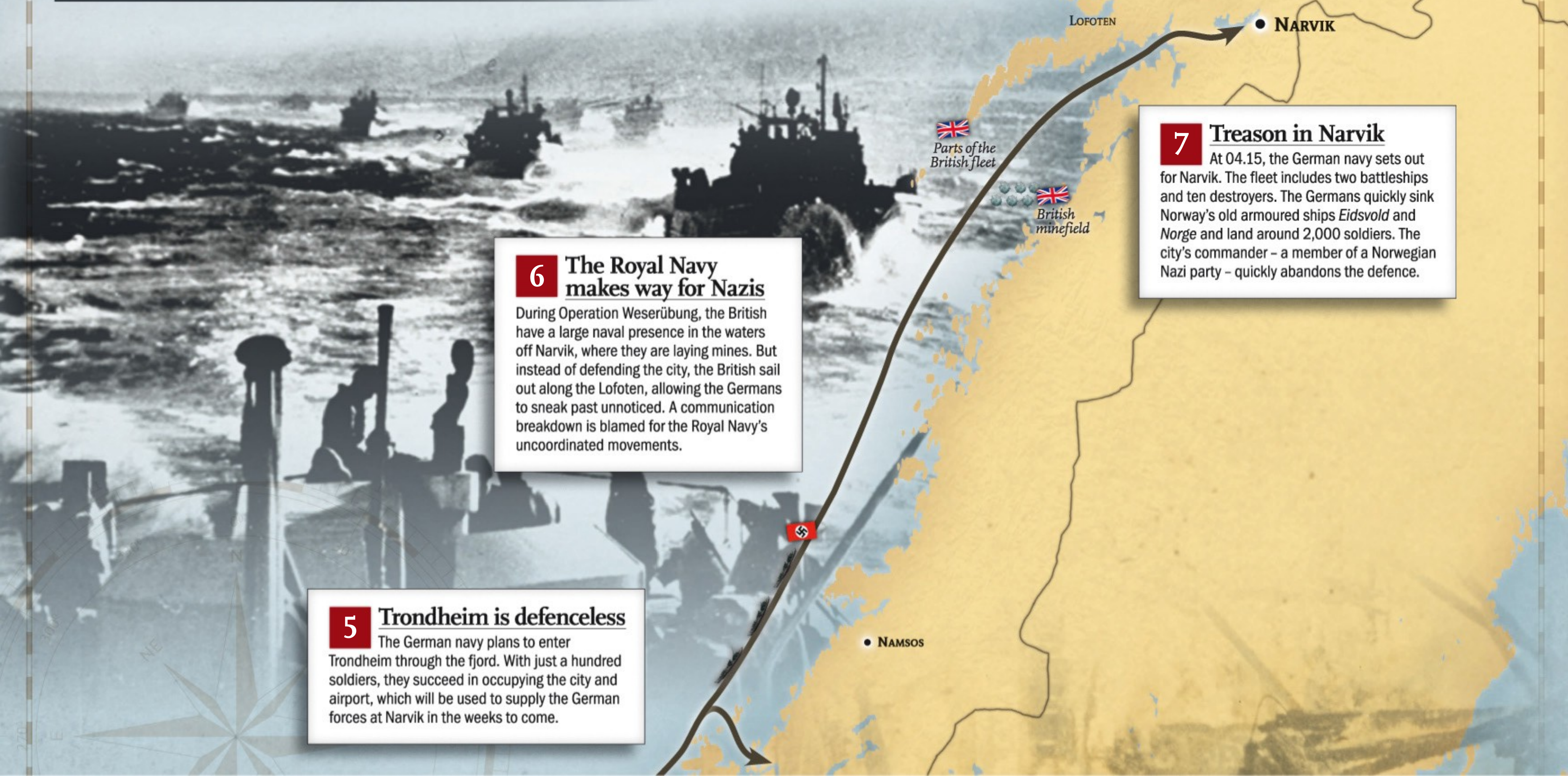
The city residential sector, on the other hand, had been hit square on. Four days after the unsuccessful landing attempt on 24th April, the two British commanders quarrelled about the best way to proceed. Lord Cork, confident in the Royal Navy’s strength, wanted to attempt a new frontal assault on Narvik, but Major-General Pierse Joseph Mackesy, the commander of the land forces, was more cautious. He wanted to use the army to surround Narvik. On 28th April, reinforcements finally arrived under the command of French General Antoine Béthouart. He was a World War I veteran and an expert on mountain warfare. With him he had three battalions of eager Alpine troops and two Foreign Legion battalions.

General Béthouart proposed a compromise. According to his plan, the Allies would land their troops at the lightly defended village of Bjerkvik, from where they would move south to attack the German flank at Narvik. At the same time, units of exiled Polish soldiers would converge on the position from the south-west, while Norwegian troops moved in from the north-east. The Royal Navy would

German soldiers shelter behind a Panzer I tank in case they run into a Norwegian-manned machine-gun nest.

Operation Weserübung

Nazi Germany devoted almost its entire fleet to the invasion of Denmark and Norway. The bold campaign involved landing troops on the coast without the British Royal Navy discovering them. The offensive, codenamed Operation Weserübung, was launched at 04.15 on 9th April 1940. Denmark surrendered after a few hours of fighting, but in Norway, the resistance was far more stubborn.



5 Trondheim is defenceless

The German navy plans to enter Trondheim through the fjord. With just a hundred soldiers, they succeed in occupying the city and airport, which will be used to supply the German forces at Narvik in the weeks to come.

6 The Royal Navy makes way for Nazis

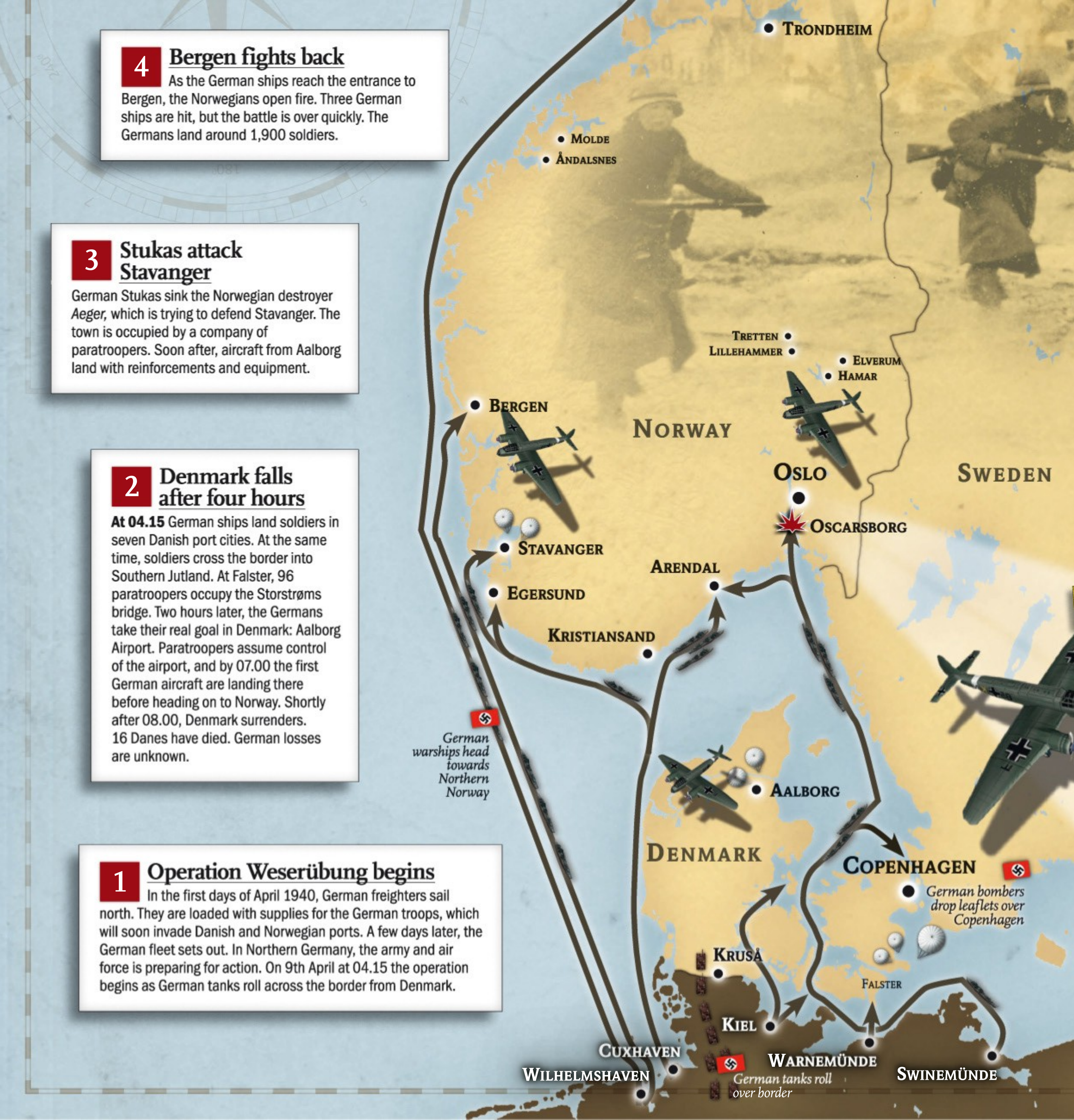
During Operation Weserübung, the British have a large naval presence in the waters off Narvik, where they are laying mines. But instead of defending the city, the British sail out along the Lofoten, allowing the Germans to sneak past unnoticed. A communication breakdown is blamed for the Royal Navy's uncoordinated movements.

7 Treason in Narvik

At 04.15, the German navy sets out for Narvik. The fleet includes two battleships and ten destroyers. The Germans quickly sink Norway's old armoured ships *Eidsvold* and *Norge* and land around 2,000 soldiers. The city's commander – a member of a Norwegian Nazi party – quickly abandons the defence.

8 Sweden agrees to Nazi demands

While Denmark and Norway are occupied, Sweden is allowed to remain free, providing it does not support its neighbours and continues exporting iron ore to Germany.


Trondheim
Molde
Åndalsnes
Tretten
Lillehammer
Elverum
Hamar
Bergen
Norway
Oslo
Oscarsborg
Sweden
Stavanger
Arendal
Egersund
Kristiansand
German warships head towards Northern Norway
Aalborg
Denmark
Copenhagen
German bombers drop leaflets over Copenhagen
Krusa
Falster
Kiel
Cuxhaven
Wilhelmshaven
Warnemünde
German tanks roll over border
Swinemünde
Germany

1 Operation Weserübung begins

In the first days of April 1940, German freighters sail north. They are loaded with supplies for the German troops, which will soon invade Danish and Norwegian ports. A few days later, the German fleet sets out. In Northern Germany, the army and air force is preparing for action. On 9th April at 04.15 the operation begins as German tanks roll across the border from Denmark.

2 Denmark falls after four hours

At 04.15 German ships land soldiers in seven Danish port cities. At the same time, soldiers cross the border into Southern Jutland. At Falster, 96 paratroopers occupy the Storstrøms bridge. Two hours later, the Germans take their real goal in Denmark: Aalborg Airport. Paratroopers assume control of the airport, and by 07.00 the first German aircraft are landing there before heading on to Norway. Shortly after 08.00, Denmark surrenders. 16 Danes have died. German losses are unknown.

3 Stukas attack Stavanger

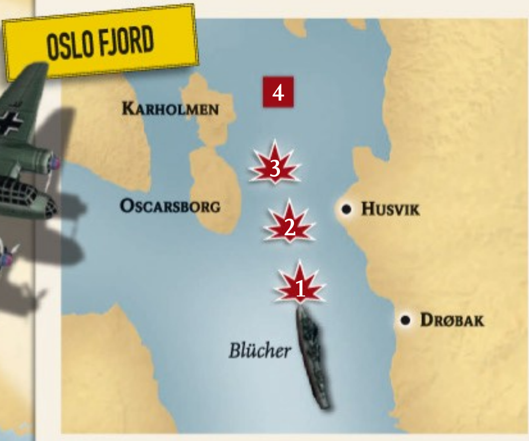
German Stukas sink the Norwegian destroyer *Aeger*, which is trying to defend Stavanger. The town is occupied by a company of paratroopers. Soon after, aircraft from Aalborg land with reinforcements and equipment.

4 Bergen fights back

As the German ships reach the entrance to Bergen, the Norwegians open fire. Three German ships are hit, but the battle is over quickly. The Germans land around 1,900 soldiers.

Antique guns sink German cruiser

- **At 04.15:** Oslo's airport, Fornebu, is occupied by 68 men.
- **At 04.20:** Oslo's German ambassador informs Foreign Minister Halvdan Koht of the attack – and demands Norway's surrender. Koht passes the message to the government, who rejects the German demands.
- **At 04.21:** German cruiser *Blücher* fired upon in the Oslo Fjord.
- **At 04.25:** Germany's ambassador in Oslo is told that Norway will not surrender. "Then there will be fighting and nothing can save you," says the ambassador. "The fight is already in progress," replies Norwegian Foreign Minister Koht.
- **At 07.30:** King Håkon and the government are evacuated by a special train.


OSLO FJORD
Karholmen
4
Oscarsborg
3
2
Husvik
1
Drøbak
Blücher

1 *Blücher* leads the German fleet towards Oslo. The coastal battery in Husvik opens fire. 2 Oscarsborg's guns hit *Blücher*. The other ships land their troops 10 km further south. 3 The torpedo battery at Karholmen hits *Blücher*. 4 The German cruiser sinks with the loss of 830 lives.

NAME

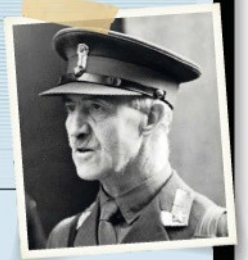
CARL GUSTAV FLEISCHER

TITLE COMMANDER OF THE NORWEGIAN FORCES

1883-1942

Narvik's hero committed suicide

At Narvik, Fleischer became the first Allied general to inflict a real defeat on the Germans. On 7th June 1940, he left the country with King Håkon. When the exiled government appointed a new commander in 1942, Fleischer felt disgraced and took his own life.



- **Critic of Norwegian disarmament.**
- **Side-lined by the exiled government.**

NAME

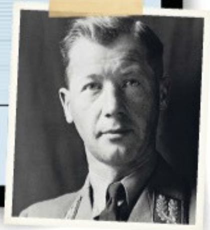
JOSEF TERBOVEN

TITLE REICH COMMISSIONER IN NORWAY

1898-1945

Hitler's bully in Norway

During the occupation, Josef Terboven terrorised the Norwegians, instigating Jewish persecution, issuing death sentences against suspected saboteurs and ordering vengeful mass shootings. He was despised by the people, and barely less so by the German military, but as he was answerable only to Hitler, he was untouchable.



- **Committed Nazi.**
- **Blew himself up in May 1945.**

bombard the Germans at Narvik directly. Both British commanders approved the plan and preparations for the Battle of Narvik began.

THE WAR RAGED IN THE MOUNTAINS

Further inland, around 10,000 Norwegian soldiers were attempting to hold back the German invaders, but every day, the Germans received new supplies from the air, helping them to capture large areas to the north and east of Narvik.

On 16th April, the Germans attacked the Norwegian positions at Bjørnfjell, near the Swedish border. Their goal was to secure the Malmbanen railway, which carried iron ore from Sweden. The Norwegians held them for a few hours, but when the Germans attacked with a 20-mm, rapid-fire gun, the Norwegian defence collapsed and Bjørnfjell was lost.

The Norwegians were exhausted and also suffered from a lack of training, heavy equipment and air support, but adversity soon hardened them. Under the leadership of General Carl Gustav Fleischer, they began to become accustomed to the soldier's life and learned to take advantage of being on home ground, using their local knowledge and skills to great effect. Soon, the Norwegians were able to match the highly trained German Alpine troops, and by the beginning of May they began to slowly advance towards Narvik. The Germans resisted, but the Norwegians cleared them from every mountain top.

On 7th May, the Norwegian soldiers captured the strategically important Hill 856. From there, they could look down to the Ofotfjord. And in the distance, lights flashed from a city: Narvik.

BJERKVIK DROWNS IN BLOOD

Just before midnight on 12th May, General Béthouart was standing on the deck of the cruiser *HMS Effingham*. Together with 14 other ships, the vessel glided over the quiet Beis Fjord. In the light of the late evening sun, the Frenchman watched four landing craft with nearly 500 men from the Foreign Legion approach the town of Bjerkvik. Once the vessels were close to land, Béthouart gave the order to open fire: "Tiré!" The shockwave from the gun's firing ripped the cigarette out of his mouth. A few seconds later, the shells crashed into Bjerkvik. One of the first buildings to be hit was the church. The Germans had been using it as an ammunition store, and the building exploded in flames. The fire spread quickly to the wooden houses, which were located throughout Bjerkvik.

The Legionnaires stormed ashore. The soldiers' briefing had claimed that the town was empty of civilians, but as Corporal Charles Favrel discovered, that wasn't true:

"A frightful butchery ensued, in the course of which we slaughtered more civilians than Germans. Machine guns riddled the doors and windows… then the infantrymen rushed forward hurling grenades… With rifle in hand, I was to scour a dreadful Calvary strewn with mangled corpses,

ALLIES COULD HAVE WON

The Allies were given plenty of chances to prevent Germany's capture of Norway, but their efforts were hampered by mismanagement, indecision and a lack of heavy equipment.

German invasion forces faced strong resistance in Northern Norway.

FIVE MONTHS OF BATTLES

1940

16TH FEBRUARY
Brits storm German tanker
British board German ship *Altmark* in Norwegian waters. Around 300 British prisoners are rescued. Hitler loses faith in Norwegian neutrality.

29TH FEBRUARY
Operation Weserübung
German General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst presents his plan for the invasion of Denmark and Norway. Hitler approves the plan, Operation Weserübung, the following day.

10TH APRIL
First naval battle
During Operation Weserübung, Germany sends half its destroyers to Narvik. Before sailing home, the British Royal Navy enters the harbour and sinks several of them.

11TH APRIL
Germans take more
General Falkenhorst receives

The Germans destroyed the port of Narvik on 28th May, while the Allies blasted the ore-carrying Malmbanen railway line just before they evacuated on 7th June.

cradles overturned on dead babies, and the wounded moaning in pools of blood."

Béthouart sent the Foreign Legion's motorcycle troops south at high speed. From the west, Polish troops advanced and two British destroyers were ready with artillery support. But it all proved unnecessary. The German troops had fled from the inferno in Bjerkvik, and the Legionaries were able to reach Øyjord, the gateway to Narvik, without meeting any resistance. Narvik was now surrounded.

"Give something up as lost only when it is lost"

General Alfred Jodl's response when Hitler revealed he was ready to cede Narvik.

CHURCHILL BACKS OFF

On the 15th May, Britain's newly appointed prime minister, Winston Churchill, was woken by a phone call. As he lifted the receiver, he heard the French prime minister, Paul Reynaud, on the other end: "We have been defeated," the Frenchman said, strain obvious in his voice. When Churchill didn't reply, he continued. "We are beaten; we have lost the battle."

Five days earlier, Germany had launched Hitler's long-planned lightning attack on the Netherlands, Belgium and France. The border had been crossed by 157 armoured divisions and it seemed that nothing could stop the German advance. The Allies were on the run across the entire front, and all of a sudden, the distant battle for Narvik, was no longer a priority for the Allies.

On 23rd May, the War Cabinet in London discussed a report from the Chiefs of Staff. It recommended that Narvik be captured, and then immediately evacuated. The Allies feared taking heavy losses if the Germans discovered they were withdrawing, so they planned to use the assault on Narvik to cover their escape.

The next day in Norway, Lord Cork received his orders. They stressed that the withdrawal must be kept secret from the Norwegians at all costs. The British thought the Norwegians might immediately surrender if they learned of the Allies new objective. If that happened, the Allies would lose their rearguard for the retreat.

"The worst of it all is the need for lying to all and sundry in order to preserve secrecy. The situation

»

reinforcements and begins to occupy the area around the Oslo Fjord. He then sends troops to the cities of Lillehammer and Trondheim.

12TH APRIL
Faroe Islands occupied
British troops occupy the Danish Faroe Islands to prevent the Germans from setting up a naval base there.

German destroyers fired on Narvik's harbour after the British attack.

13TH APRIL
Second naval Battle of Narvik
The Royal Navy returns and sinks the remainder of the ten German destroyers. In Narvik, 2,000 German soldiers fear the British will try to occupy the city.

14TH APRIL
Hitler is ready to withdraw
During a meeting with his general staff, Hitler suggests that the Germans abandon Narvik. One of Hitler's closest advisers manages to persuade him to hold on.

14TH APRIL
Allies land soldiers
The first Allied soldiers are landed at Harstad in Northern Norway. They are part of Rupert Force, whose objective is to take back Narvik.

16TH APRIL
British move towards Trondheim
Allied soldiers from Maurice Force go ashore at Namsos. Their goal is to free Trondheim, but much of their equipment hasn't arrived. After a week, the corps is forced to give up its mission and return.

18TH APRIL
Allied landing in Åndalsnes
Primrose Force arrives at Åndalsnes and takes the train to Dombås. Together with Maurice Force, its goal is to free Trondheim, but German resistance proves too strong.

▶

FOR LITTER
STRAND
& NORWAY INVADED
EVENING NEWS
NORWAY AT WAR WITH GERMANY
NAZIS BOMB TOWNS IN NORWAY
THE STAR

A British newspaper seller announces the German invasion of Norway on 9th April 1940.

vis-a-vis the Norwegians is particularly difficult and one feels a most despicable creature in pretending that we are going on fighting, when we are going to quit at once," British General Auchinleck wrote.

The Germans leave Narvik

The final assault on Narvik began at midnight on 28th May. It was vital that the first soldiers landed in Narvik unseen so that a bridgehead could be established. The crossing took place in silence. Only once the vessels were close to shore was a red flare launched to signal the start of the Royal Navy's bombardment of the German positions. At first, the British soldiers advanced easily, but the situation soon changed.

Two of the attackers' tanks got stuck in mud on the beach. Norwegian and French troops became mixed up in the chaos of battle and all met with strong resistance. One group of German soldiers entrenched themselves in a tunnel, which was only cleared when Legionaries positioned a gun at the tunnel's mouth and opened fire.

Eventually Narvik's German commander, Major Haussel, had only 400 men left. After just over seven hours of fighting – at 06.50 on 28th May – Haussel ordered a retreat from Narvik; the Allied soldiers arrived in the afternoon.

"Everyone lined the streets and cheered and we waved little French, English and Polish flags that the women had secretly sewn during the German occupation", the city's mayor recalled

After Narvik's fall, it seemed only a matter of time before the Nazis were pushed out of Northern Norway. They were squeezed into a small area of Bjørnfjell, near the border, and the Norwegian 6th Division was moving ever closer.

The Germans, recognising their impending defeat, had several trains waiting to evacuate their troops. But just as the Norwegians were fighting to clear Bjørnfjell, the Allies began evacuating their forces from the coast. By the time the Norwegians were ready to finish the Germans off, it was already too late. The final storming of Bjørnfjell should have taken place on 8th June, but it never came. The Norwegian government had met for the last time in Norway the day before and decided that the situation was futile.

On 9th June, the last Allied soldiers left Norway. On the same day, the Norwegian troops were ordered to disband to avoid being taken captive The undefeated soldiers swapped their uniforms for civilian clothes. The mood in the ranks was at rock-bottom.

Narvik was in ruins. Stray donkeys wandered around the charred remains. The animals had been left behind when the Allies evacuated the city. Many of them had served with the Foreign Legion in the scorched lands of North Africa. Now they had been abandoned under Norway's midnight sun.

"I survived and maintained my position… while all the blame was thrown on poor Mr Chamberlain"

Winston Churchill on the failed Narvik campaign.

1940

Instead the corps continues by train to Lillehammer to relieve the Norwegians there.

23RD APRIL
Primrose wiped out
Primrose Force has fought through the Gudbrandsdalen, but the soldiers are inexperienced, and at the town of Tretten, the corps is virtually obliterated by the Germans.

28TH APRIL
South Norway lost
The Allies decide to abandon Southern Norway and evacuate its surviving forces. Some soldiers fleeing the battle near Tretten commandeer trucks and drive to the coast. Others sneak across the border to Sweden on foot.

29TH APRIL
The Germans bomb the Molde
The king and his government have to leave Molde. Tromsø is their new HQ.

2ND AND 3RD MAY
Allied evacuation
Stukas attack the remnants of Primrose and Maurice Force as they sail away. A French and a British destroyer are sunk. Southern Norway is in German hands.

10TH MAY
Hitler opens the Western Front
The Nazis invade the Netherlands and Belgium, bypassing the French Maginot line between Germany and France. On the same day, Neville Chamberlain resigns; the new British prime minister is Winston Churchill.

28TH MAY
Narvik is liberated
Troops from Norway, France, Britain and Poland capture the port city of Narvik.

7TH JUNE
Narvik is abandoned
Nazis are ready to cede Northern Norway when suddenly the Allied forces leave Narvik.

9TH JUNE
Norway is lost
Norwegian soldiers lay down their arms. The king and government have already left aboard a British naval vessel.

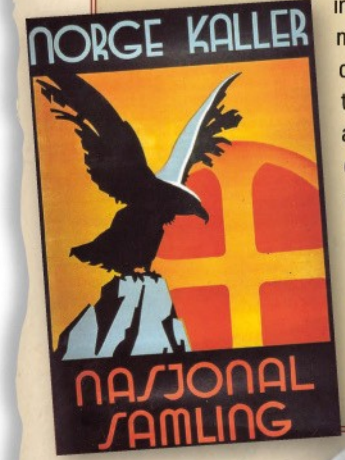
Norway was treated more harshly than Denmark

While Denmark initially cooperated with the Germans and retained its own government, Norway immediately came under German rule. On the other hand, the Danes began to resist as early as 1941, much earlier than the Norwegians.

Norway was ruled by Nazis

Initially, Norway was ruled by a council under the German ambassador, Curt Bräuer. Then Reich commissioner Josef Terboven took control until 1st February 1942, after which Norwegian Nazi sympathiser Vidkun Quisling led a puppet government.

After 9th April, government continued as normal in Denmark – at least on paper. Although formally classed as independent and neutral, this was conditional on the government agreeing to cooperate fully with the Germans.

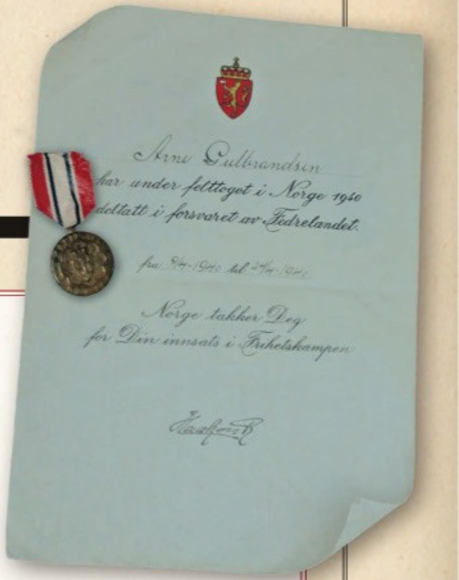


Nasjonal Samling was a Norwegian Nazi Party.

Danes cooperated

Throughout the occupation, the Norwegians offered passive resistance. They defied attempts to put Nazis in positions of leadership within their church and cultural life or allow Nazi ideology to become the norm.

Initially, the Danes accepted the German occupation, but that changed when the Nazis were defeated in the Battle of Britain in 1940. The Danes began to show passive resistance and later instigated more open forms of rebellion. By August 1943, popular resistance was so pronounced that the Danish government had to abandon any pretence at cooperation when it refused to sanction the death penalty for acts of sabotage.



Arne Gulbrandsen
har under felttoget i Norge 1940
deltatt i forsvaret av Fedrelandet.

fra 9/4-1940 til [illegible]/4-1940

Norge takker Deg
for Din innsats i Frihetskampen

Haakon R

Norwegians who defended their country received medals after the war.

Norwegians avoided armed rebellion

The Norwegian government in exile in Britain asked the Norwegians to avoid participating in acts of sabotage or violent resistance for fear that it would provoke even greater oppression. The recommendation was widely followed: apart from the last six months of the war, Norwegian resistance groups practiced only limited sabotage.

Only after 22nd June 1941 did Denmark have a notable resistance movement. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union on that day, Danish Communists initiated an armed rebellion. Soon, civic groups also joined the action. Despite their political differences, the various resistance groups cooperated well.

Victims of war

10,262

Norwegians perished during the war: 3,638 sailors, c. 2,000 soldiers, 2,091 resistance operatives, c. 1,850 civilians, 689 on the Eastern Front and 610 Jews.

10,433

Danes perished during the war: 2,685 civilians, 2,000 sailors, 600 in camps, 400 German workers, 63 in Allied service and c. 2,000 on the Eastern Front.

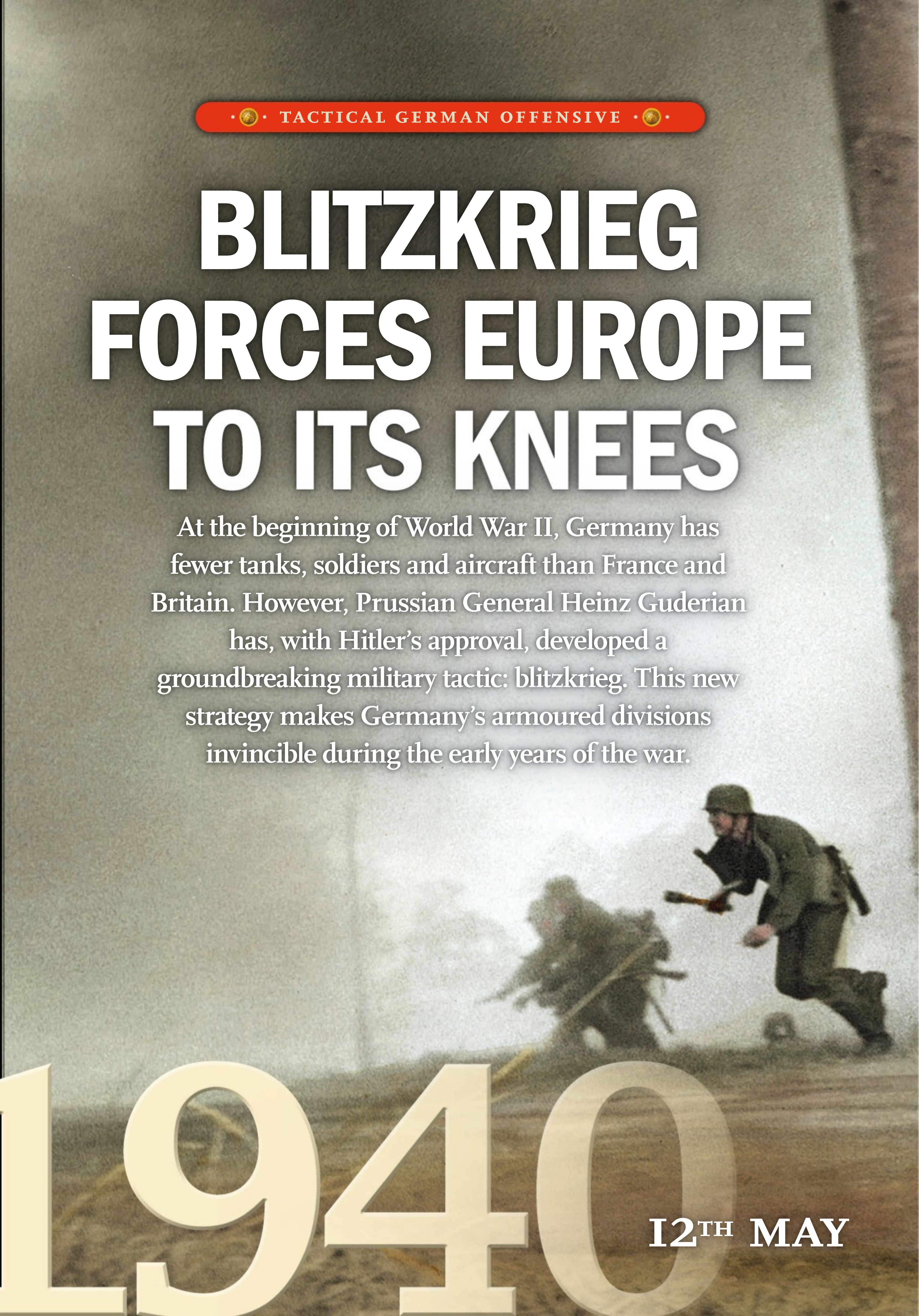
Armbands were worn in 1945 by the resistance.

On 11th May 1945, the Norwegian resistance group Milorg took Akershus Fortress from the Germans.

TACTICAL GERMAN OFFENSIVE

BLITZKRIEG FORCES EUROPE TO ITS KNEES

At the beginning of World War II, Germany has fewer tanks, soldiers and aircraft than France and Britain. However, Prussian General Heinz Guderian has, with Hitler's approval, developed a groundbreaking military tactic: blitzkrieg. This new strategy makes Germany's armoured divisions invincible during the early years of the war.



1940

12TH MAY

Following an initial aerial bombardment, German infantry storm the enemy's lines flanked by tanks. The assault is supported by powerful artillery guns.

THE STAGE IS SET

Hitler's armies blast through France's defences. In six weeks, the Germans have overrun one of Europe's major nations thanks to a new form of warfare. Conceived by a veteran of WWI, the new tactic is known as *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) and is based on a combination of light bombers and fast armoured divisions.

Sedan
FRANCE

Radio contact between the tanks ensured success in joint attacks.

On 12th May 1940, Stuka bombers swarmed over the French trenches near the town of Sedan. Germany's invasion of France was in full swing. The air reverberated to the sounds of explosions and the howling sirens of small dive bombers plunging into almost vertical dives before releasing their 250-kilogram bombs. The French soldiers at Sedan had unknowingly become the victims of history's greatest air strikes so far – and to the Germans' new blitzkrieg style of war.

The sounds of Stuka sirens shredded the nerves of the soldiers on the ground, who cowered in their trenches. Suddenly, at 15.30, the noise from the screaming Stukas was drowned out by an infernal thunder as hundreds of German artillery guns opened fire. This devastating bombardment rained destruction on what was left of the French trenches.

The shells shredded the barbed wire and smashed the defenders' bunkers. German planes and guns spent the next 30 minutes systematically bombing the French lines.

At 16.00, the guns fell silent. The first tactical phase of the Germans' new lightning war was over – German reconnaissance units would now probe the defences, searching for the weakest point in the destabilised French positions.

The theory behind the new tactic had been formulated by a veteran of World War I – Heinz Guderian – who had first-hand experience of how bloody and hopeless trench warfare could be. He realised that a massive combined attack by tanks and aircraft could break through an opponent's line of defence. Hitler was thrilled with Guderian's ideas and made the tactician a general shortly after seizing power in 1933.

To ensure the success of Guderian's lightning war, Hitler developed one of World War II's most effective war machines: the armoured panzer divisions.

Previously, German infantry, artillery and tanks had been distributed throughout the different forces. Now they were combined to create devastating weapons. The divisions' mobility and their ability to exploit the strengths of their various units were the main reasons why the Germans won so many victories in the early years of the war. An individual armoured division usually consisted of 16,000 men and 3,000 vehicles. This included around 200 tanks, gathered in large groups, which could easily defeat the small, scattered clusters of tanks fielded by the enemy.

In addition to the armoured weapons, the panzer divisions were equipped with assault guns and soldiers in armoured vehicles that supported the tanks. Finally, mobile supply troops with fuel and ammunition completed the German's new war machine, which at the beginning of World War II shattered all resistance.

ARMOURED DIVISION BREAKS THROUGH

Two days after the barrage at Sedan on 14th May 1940, General Guderian's 2nd Panzer Army blazed through the French barbed wire on the Sedan front. The day before, engineering troops in personnel carriers had declared that this was weakest point in the French line of defence – and now the heavy tanks were rolling through what was left of the enemy's fortifications.

The rotating tracks of the 200 attacking tanks churned up the ground and shook the French trenches. Exhausted after the intense artillery bombardment and demoralised by the Stukas' screaming sirens, the French soldiers fled

NAME **HEINZ GUDERIAN**

TITLE GERMAN GENERAL

1888–1954

Prussian officer devised lightning war

Veteran officer Heinz Guderian had personal experience of failed German attempts to capture Allied trenches in northern France during WWI. He observed how fast vehicles and aircraft could revolutionise warfare and help overrun entrenched positions. If tanks were assembled in large groups, they could break through enemy lines and secure victory. Guderian described his theories in the book *Achtung – Panzer!* and the tactics proved effective on the battlefields of Poland in 1939 and the following year in France: both countries were defeated in under six weeks.

- Veteran from World War I.
- Architect of German blitzkrieg tactics.

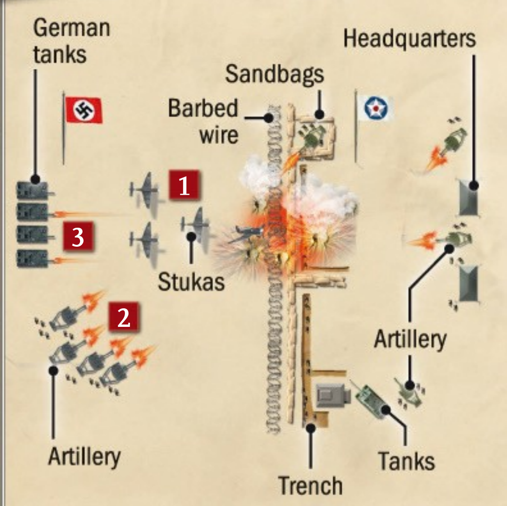
“A combined attack by tanks and aircraft could break an opponent’s line of defence”

Heavy German artillery shelled Soviet defences on the Eastern Front in 1942. Blitzkrieg tactics were less effective against stubborn Red Army pockets of resistance.

Four phases secured German victories

The German strategy was designed to engineer a rapid breakthrough of the opponent's lines of defence, followed by the systematic destruction of any remaining resistance among the enemy's isolated forces.

PHASE 1


German tanks
Headquarters
Sandbags
Barbed wire
1
3
Stukas
2
Artillery
Artillery
Tanks
Trench

Soften the enemy

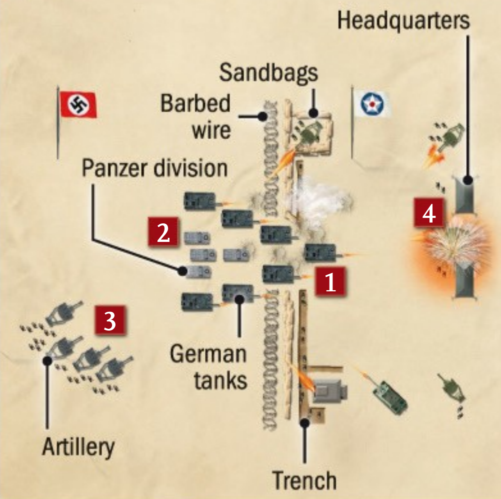
Artillery guns start a vigorous bombardment of the weakest point in the enemy's position, while dive bombers take out enemy tanks and their defences.

1 **Stukas attack** the enemy guns, tanks, bunkers and other heavily fortified defences.

2 **Artillery fires** thousands of shells against the weakest point in the enemy front line at the same time.

3 **Tanks help** with the initial bombardment, but remain out of range of any enemy counterattacks.

PHASE 2


Headquarters
Sandbags
Barbed wire
Panzer division
4
2
1
3
German tanks
Artillery
Trench

Pierce the enemy

Tank units penetrate the enemy's defence; infantry forces follow.

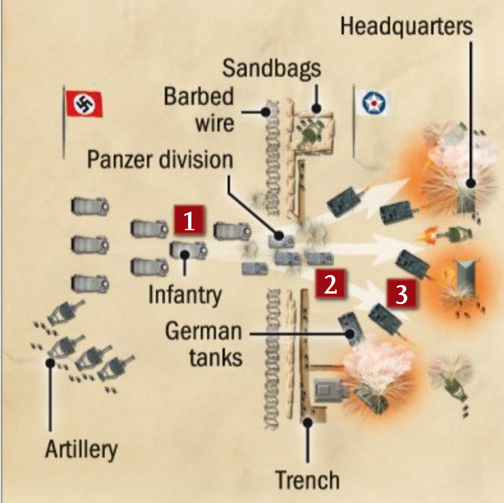
1 **Tanks assault** the weakest point in the enemy line of defence in a wedge formation. Once through, they attack enemy command centres.

2 **Soldiers in armoured** vehicles support the tanks' assault, advancing behind enemy lines to take new targets.

3 **Artillery is ready** to attack any highly fortified enemy positions.

4 **The enemy's headquarters** is relatively unprotected and vulnerable behind the front line.

PHASE 3


Headquarters
Sandbags
Barbed wire
Panzer division
1
Infantry
2
3
German tanks
Artillery
Trench

Attack deep

Tanks continue into enemy territory, severing all communication. The troops start to surround the enemy.

1 **Troop transports** move forward. Their job is to ensure that enemy troops do not close the gap in the line of defence and cut off the attacking tanks.

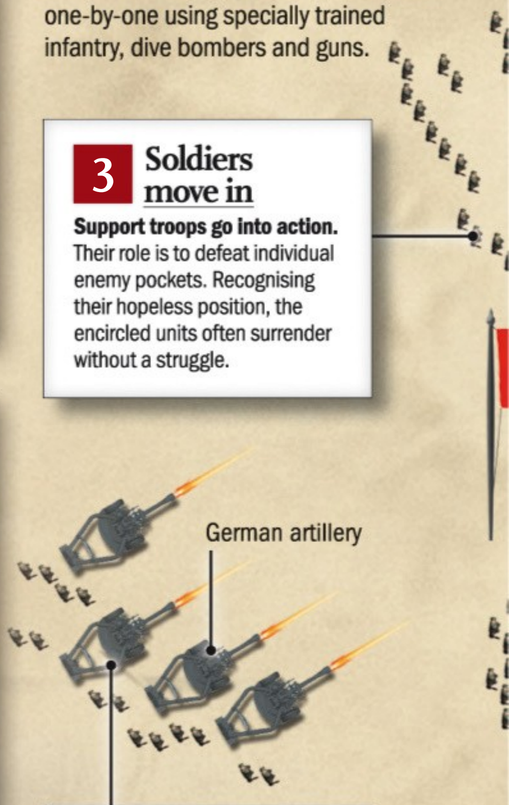
2 **Tanks attack** the enemy headquarters, disable their communication systems and create chaos and confusion.

3 **The motorised forces** spread deep behind the enemy line. Tasks include surrounding the forces manning defence installations and defeating supply troops.

PHASE 4

Take on the enemy

The enemy forces are isolated in 'pockets' – they no longer have access to supplies or contact with the outside world. The pockets are defeated one-by-one using specially trained infantry, dive bombers and guns.


German artillery

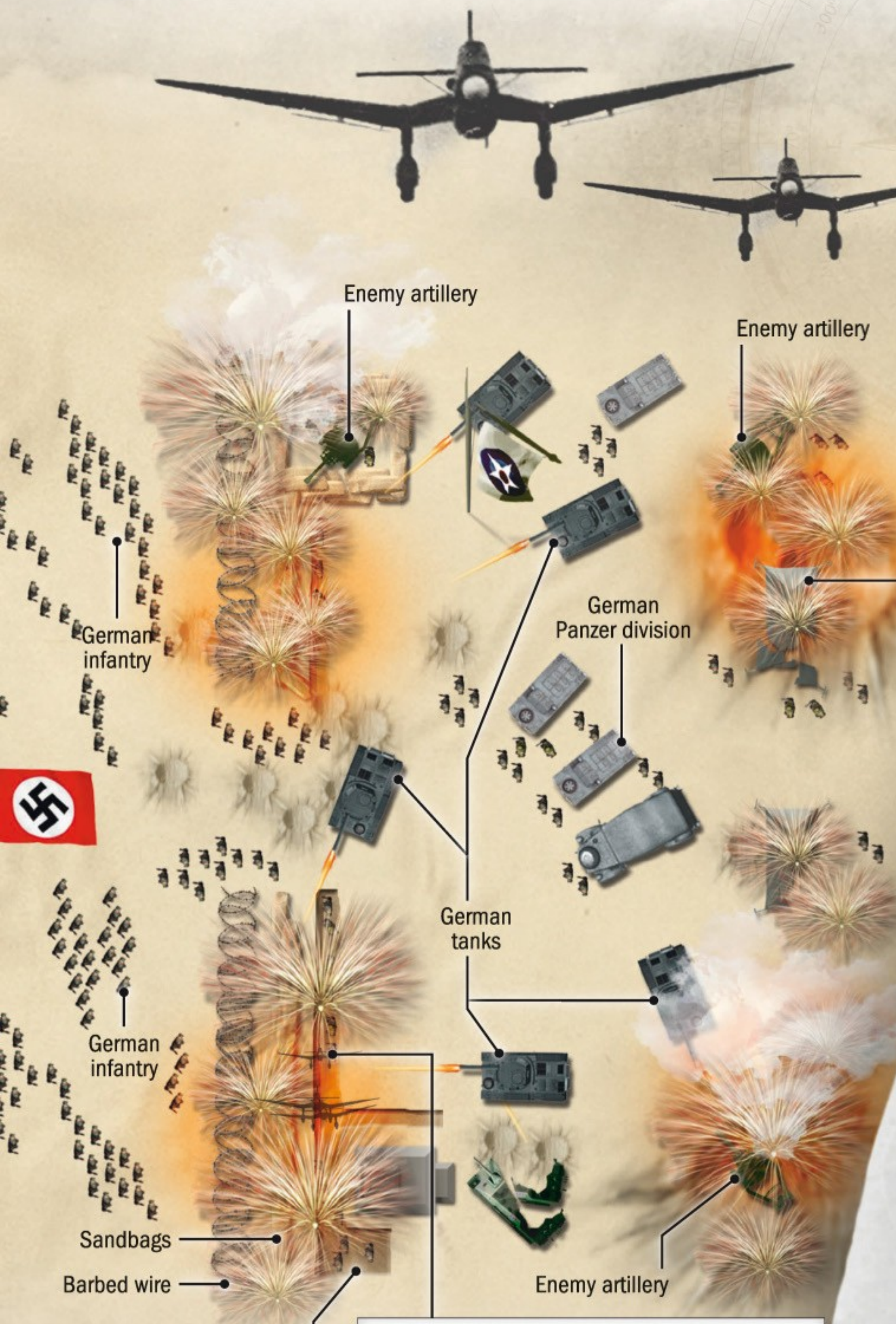
3 Soldiers move in

Support troops go into action. Their role is to defeat individual enemy pockets. Recognising their hopeless position, the encircled units often surrender without a struggle.

2 Massive bombing

The artillery launches a fierce bombardment of the pockets, which is designed to weaken enemy resistance.

The 15-tonne Panzer II heavy tank was the backbone of the German armoured divisions.


Enemy artillery
Enemy artillery
Enemy headquarters
German Panzer division
German infantry
German tanks
German infantry
Sandbags
Barbed wire
Trench
Enemy artillery

1 The enemy is surrounded

The enemy forces are now surrounded and locked inside a pocket, where they are cut off from communicating with the outside world and have no chance of receiving reinforcements or supplies.

Infantry that marched and fought on foot still made up the bulk of the German army during World War II.

German soldiers fight for control of one of the Maginot Line's fortifications in France in June 1940. Flamethrowers were often used to clear bunkers during the battles for these fortified positions.

German troops attack a French position in June 1940. The soldiers are supported by fire from powerful artillery units.

Waffen-SS' panzer crews wore a black cap with German eagles and Totenkopf skull and crossbones.

in panic. France's army commanders tried to summon reserves to plug the widening gap in their line, but the thousands of panicking soldiers were creating chaos, and their heavy tanks became stuck on the jammed roads. Meanwhile, the German tanks rolled unwaveringly on through the kilometre-wide gap while German infantry established defensive positions with mortars and anti-tank guns.

The Germans storm out

French reserves marching towards the front were easy pickings for German tanks and reconnaissance units. Stukas chased French tanks, bombing them one by one. Only 20 kilometres behind the front line, Guderian ordered his tanks to the west – behind the heavily fortified Maginot Line, which extended along the French-German border.

Infantry in the armoured divisions of World War II had armour-plated personnel carriers that offered protection and could quickly move them around the battlefield.

The German manoeuvre surrounded the French soldiers in what was supposed to be their 'impregnable' fortress. Now, they were isolated without any possibility of help. The rest of the German divisions stormed towards the English Channel, reaching it in 10 days. 400,000 Allied soldiers in north-west France and Belgium were thus cut off from their main force and unable to obtain supplies and ammunition. Trapped in a 'pocket' at the French port of Dunkirk, they were forced to escape to Britain in a hastily assembled flotilla that included everything from warships to fishing boats.

France's army was on the point of collapse, but the final defeat of the encircled forces would come at the hands of Germany's special support troops.

The Germans' greatest victory

By the end of May 1940, the encircled French soldiers were fighting for their lives in the fortifications at Sedan and along the Maginot Line. The German special support units moved from bunker to bunker with flamethrowers and grenades. The prospect of dying in a hopeless battle caused the French soldiers to surrender in their thousands. Soon, the road to Paris was open, and on 25th June 1940, France surrendered.

In just six weeks, the German armoured divisions defeated one of Europe's great powers and assuaged many Germans of the bitterness they had felt following their defeat in WWI. The French campaign was destined not only to be the Germans' first blitzkrieg, but also their greatest. The following year – during the invasion of the Soviet Union – the lightning war began to slow as the Russians fought bitterly in every enclosed pocket.

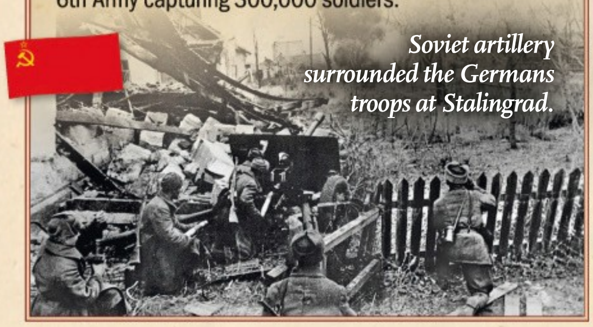
The fierce battles delayed the infantry's advance and isolated the German armoured divisions several hundred kilometres ahead of the rest of the army. The lack of fuel, ammunition and auxiliary troops ultimately halted the German advance just 20 kilometres shy of Moscow in December 1941. Guderian's blitzkrieg had finally stalled.

Allies successfully copied blitzkrieg tactics

Following Germany's early victories, the Allies soon adopted its lightning war tactics. From 1942, they fought Hitler at his own game in offenses both on the Eastern Front and on the battlefields of Western Europe. Blitzkrieg tactics are still used today when there is sufficient air and armoured strength available.

Battle of Stalingrad

France's rapid defeat in 1940 led the US, Soviet and British military to change the structure of their armies. The Allies began concentrating their tanks in large units, rather than spreading them through their forces. From spring 1942, they fought the formerly invincible German army with the blitzkrieg four-phase approach, including at the Battle of Stalingrad, where in November 1942, the Soviets surrounded the German 6th Army capturing 300,000 soldiers.



Soviet artillery surrounded the Germans troops at Stalingrad.

Canadian armoured forces participated in the dash through France in 1944.

The outbreak from the bridgehead after D-Day

Once the Allies had landed on the Normandy coast in June 1944, they advanced rapidly. The outbreak from the bridgehead established in the north of France proceeded quickly. Aircraft and armoured units combined to break the German lines and clear the path for the liberation of Paris.

Gulf wars against Iraq

Even today, Heinz Guderian's groundbreaking theories of lightning war still apply. The two Gulf Wars that were waged against Iraq in 1990-1991 and 2003 are text-book examples of the superiority of modern warfare. The coalition first softened up the enemy with a lengthy and powerful bombardment of strategic targets, followed by a rapid armoured assault, which quickly defeated Saddam Hussein's weakened forces.

American F-16 fighters bombed Iraq during Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

British pilots were always on alert. Spitfires were expected to be in the air ten minutes after German planes appeared on the radar.

1940

10TH JULY

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

BRITISH PILOTS HOLD OFF THE LUFTWAFFE

In the summer of 1940 a battle breaks out that will last for 114 days. First, the Luftwaffe attack merchant ships in the English Channel, then the Germans smash British radar installations and air bases before relentlessly bombing London.
But the British “few” are stubborn.

THE STAGE IS SET

In June 1940, Hitler's blitzkrieg attack crushes France with lightning speed. The Nazis only need to defeat Britain before all of Western Europe is in their grasp. The British stubbornly refuse to surrender, however – not least the Royal Air Force, which proves to be a far more dangerous enemy than the Germans expected.

BRITAIN
London

63 schools

trained pilots for the Luftwaffe in 1940. The German air force possessed around 5,000 highly trained pilots who could be sent into the skies over Britain.

After a grey and drizzly morning, the sun shone again over Dover's white cliffs on Wednesday, 10th July 1940. The sunbeams sparkled on the water as a convoy of freight ships passed. The vessels looked like small toys placed in an idyllic model landscape. It was a beautiful summer day in southern England.

But fighter pilot John Thompson did not have time to enjoy the view from his cockpit. His eyes were trained firmly on a formation of German bombers that approached with deadly intent, ready to drop their deadly payload on to the convoy below. While anti-aircraft guns fired from the beach, Thompson took charge of 12 Hurricane fighters, flying directly towards the enemy planes. The two formations approached each other at a combined speed of 900 km/h.

Suddenly the bombers turned and fled. Thompson followed, took aim and fired his aircraft's machine guns. One enemy bomber crashed into the ocean leaving a trail of smoke behind it. From the beach, local residents watched as the combatants swarmed around one another.

The aerial fight was the first significant incident in what would become known as the Battle of Britain. The conflict was history's first major air battle, and the 114-day onslaught would not only allow Britain to maintain air superiority over her own islands, but would also mark a turning point in WWII. Until then, 1940 had seen a heady series of triumphs for the Third Reich. In April, German troops had effortlessly taken Denmark and Norway, and in May, Holland, Belgium and France fell too. The United States had remained neutral and the Soviet Union was willingly cooperating with the Germans. Only Britain now stood in the way of a Europe united under the shadow of the swastika. The only question was how long she could hold out?

British troops had been stationed in France since the war broke out in September 1939, but in the summer of 1940, Hitler's apparently unstoppable army had pushed the British back to the Dunkirk beaches, from where they were evacuated at the last minute before being pushed into the sea. Thousands of weapons and trucks as well as several tonnes of ammunition and fuel were left on the beaches. It was a military disaster for Britain, which was left on the brink of collapse.

"Final victory over England is now only a matter of time," concluded Germany's Chief of Staff Alfred Jodl.

Channel's freight ships were the target

Operation Sea Lion, as the German invasion plan was codenamed, was due to deliver the killer blow. It was based on the Blitzkrieg principle – the combination of infantry, tank and air bombardments that had brought the Germans success throughout Europe. Hitler, however, had no illusions

NAME **HERMANN GÖRING**

TITLE REICH MARSHAL

1893-1946

Airman became supreme commander

An airman from WWI, fighter pilot Hermann Göring was one of Hitler's right-hand men from 1933. Göring created the Gestapo, but left it to Heinrich Himmler in 1935 in favour of a job as commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe. After the Germans' lightning victory in 1939-40, Göring was made supreme commander of the entire Wehrmacht – a position he kept throughout war. He was also Hitler's deputy.

- **Given Grand Cross of the Iron Cross.**
- **Committed suicide in prison.**

NAME **HUGH DOWDING**

TITLE AIR MARSHAL

1882-1970

War veteran countered Hitler's plan

Hugh Dowding had been a fighter pilot in World War I, and was appointed head of the Royal Air Force in 1936. In addition to managing the RAF at the beginning of World War II, he was also the architect of an integrated air defence system. It included a messaging system whereby radar observations were promptly analysed and passed on to the RAF, which took to the air as soon as an observation was verified as a genuine attack.

- **Retired from the RAF in 1942.**
- **Was made a baron in 1943.**

The Royal Air Force was established in 1918 as an independent unit and is the world's oldest air force.

about the task ahead. Since the battle of Hastings in 1066, no one had managed to cross the Channel and invade Britain. He had to get rid of the Royal Air Force (RAF), otherwise his fleet and army would be unable to land on British soil.

The Nazis transferred bombers and fighters to newly built bases in northern France and began bombing ships in the English Channel. The Germans termed these attacks *Kanalkampf* (Channel war), their purpose being to cut Britain's supply lines while destroying as many British aircraft as possible.

Many of the German pilots had served in Condor Legion, during the Spanish Civil War. Their experience had led them to develop a loose flight formation that was better suited to dog fights than the traditional V-formation the British used. With its superior tactics, combat-hardened pilots and new aircraft, the German Luftwaffe ought to have been superior.

Churchill: “We will never surrender”

Although Hitler and his staff planned Operation Sea Lion down to the smallest detail, they didn't believe a real military invasion would be necessary. Hitler assumed that Britain would recognise “her militarily hopeless situation” and that a small push would be enough to make the British surrender and sign a peace accord on German terms.

Much had changed since October 1938, however, when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had signed the Munich Agreement with the German dictator in the hope of there being “peace for our time”. Winston Churchill had been appointed to the office on the same day the German tanks had rolled into France and he was not a man to be easily intimidated. After the last British troops had been evacuated from Dunkirk, he declared that “We shall go on to the end... We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; We will never surrender.”

Aggressive tactics surprised the Germans

The Luftwaffe was therefore surprised at the dogged resistance it met over the English Channel. The RAF had just over 600 modern fighter planes, half the German number. But in spite of Britain's unquestionable numerical inferiority in both pilots and machines, they shot down ten German aircraft on the first day for the loss of just two planes.

Technically, the British fighter planes were more on a par with their German counterparts, and the RAF was a tougher opponent than the poorly equipped air forces that the German pilots had been up against until that point. In addition, the British had the advantage that German fighters had to use fuel to cross the Channel and fight over enemy territory. Thus, they only had a short time to engage the enemy before they had to return home – if they could.

In the bitter fighting that followed, one of the British squadrons developed a bold tactic. Instead of flying over the German bombers and turning to attack them from behind, they flew directly towards the German aircraft while firing their machine guns. This approach made it easier for the British to target their enemies and forced the German pilots to turn to avoid a collision. This made them even easier to hit. But it was a dangerous tactic and RAF fighters did sometimes collide with German foes.

For almost a month, German attacks continued on British ships and ports. And although British fighters tried to protect the convoys, many cargo ships with vital supplies were sunk. Losses in the air were high on both sides, but the RAF accounted for most ‘kills'; between 10th and 23rd July, the British lost 45 aircraft to the Luftwaffe's 82.

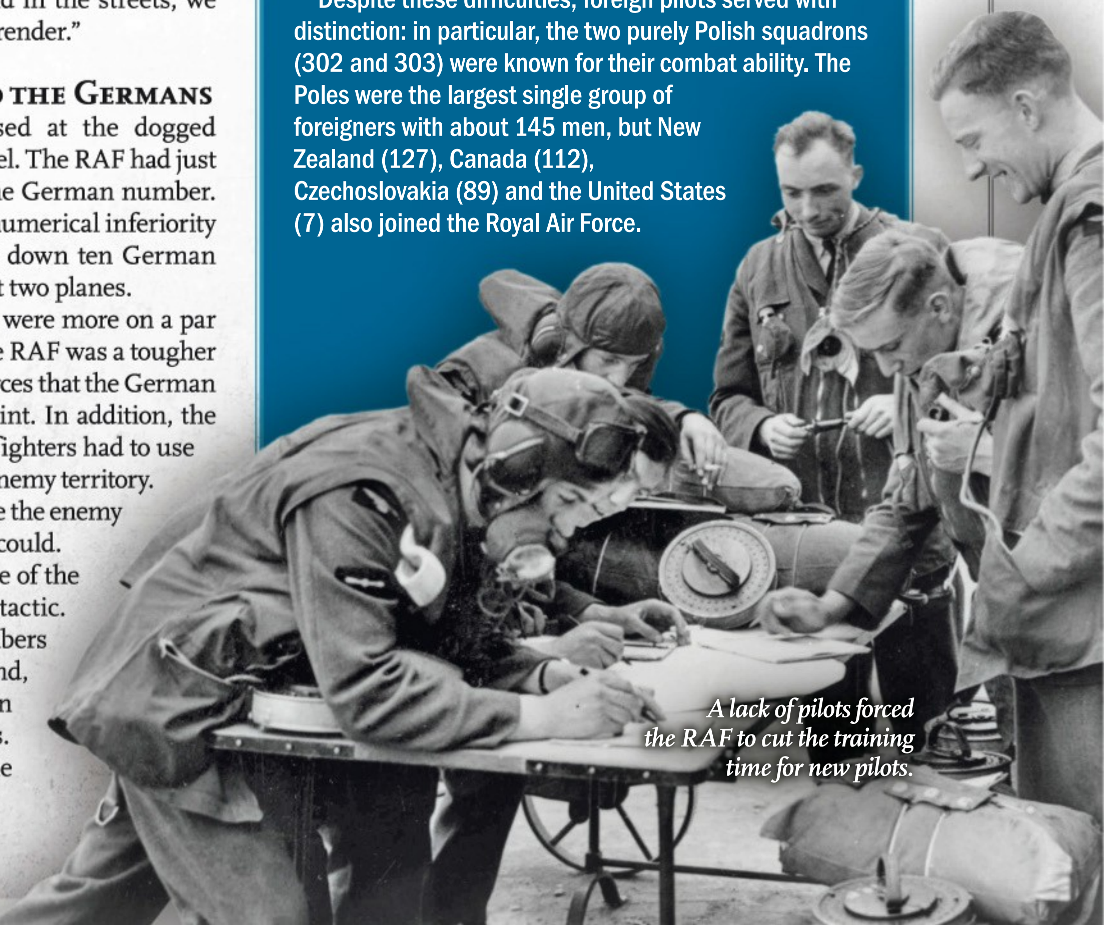
It didn't take the Germans long to realise that they needed to change their strategy to counter the skill and determination of the RAF pilots. Consequently they began to focus on destroying British airbases, aircraft and radar equipment. Head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring,

Foreign pilots helped the British

Pilots from countries occupied by the Nazis eagerly joined the RAF and fought like heroes against the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain.

Of the nearly 3,000 pilots who fought for the British in WWII, 574 were foreigners. Some had fled from countries that had just been occupied by the Germans. These men were highly motivated and often possessed great experience. The language proved a major barrier, however, and foreigners rarely came equipped with experience of modern planes such as the Spitfire.

Despite these difficulties, foreign pilots served with distinction: in particular, the two purely Polish squadrons (302 and 303) were known for their combat ability. The Poles were the largest single group of foreigners with about 145 men, but New Zealand (127), Canada (112), Czechoslovakia (89) and the United States (7) also joined the Royal Air Force.



A lack of pilots forced the RAF to cut the training time for new pilots.

FIGHTERS

Fighter plane was better equipped

The German Messerschmitt-fighter was both faster and better armed than the British Spitfire, but the Spitfire couldn't be beaten on manoeuvrability.

Both the British Spitfire and German Messerschmitt Bf 109 belonged to a new generation of combat aircraft. Germany developed the Bf 109 immediately after Hitler came to power in 1933, while the first Spitfire went into the air the following year in reaction to Germany's rearming. The two machines were well matched although the Bf 109 was faster. The German plane also had the advantage in terms of weapons. In addition to two machine guns mounted on the hull, the Messerschmitts carried two 20-mm machine guns on its wings. The Spitfire only had 8-mm machine guns (four machine guns on each wing).

Messerschmitt could fly higher

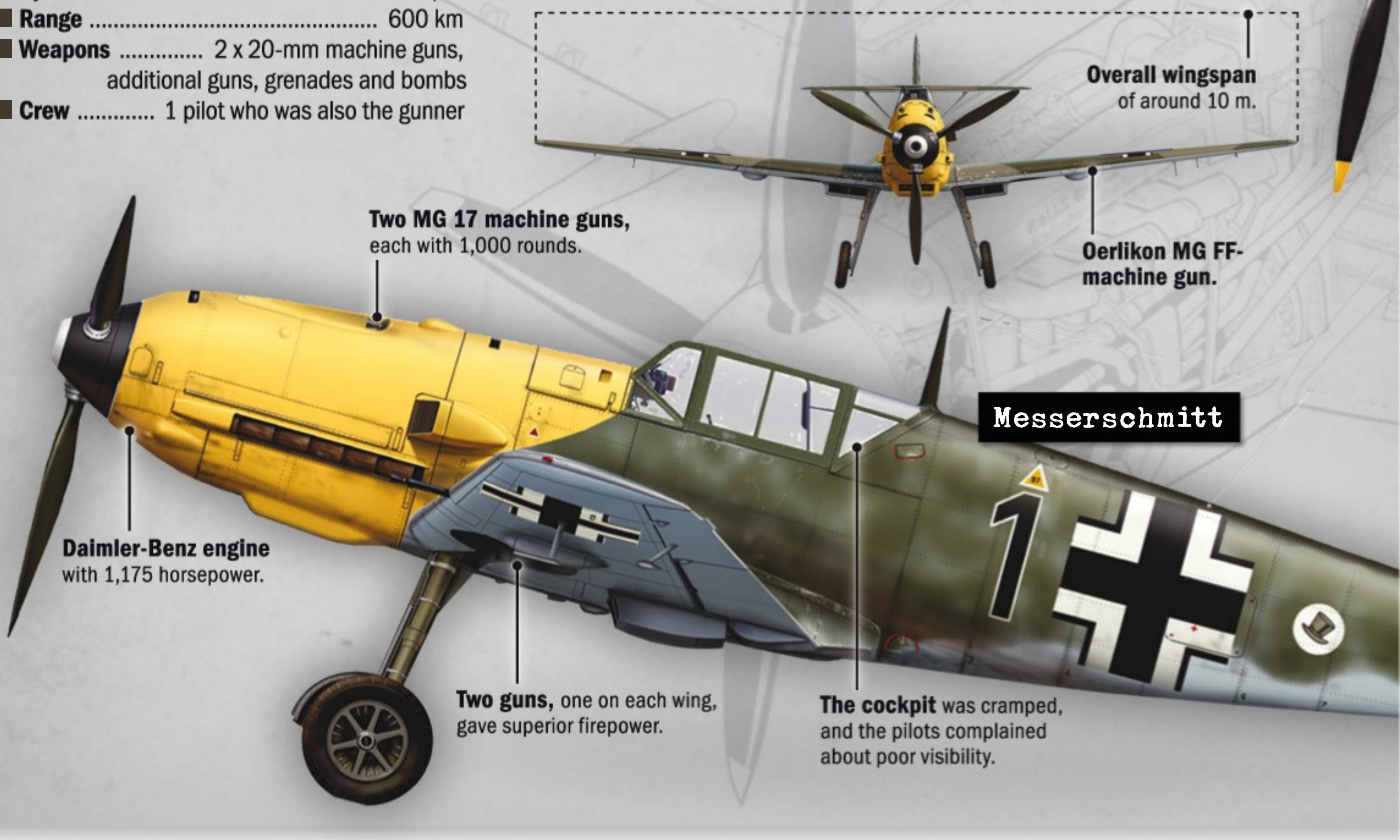
Range was a challenge during the Battle of Britain. With a full tank, a Messerschmitt Bf 109 could fly 600 kilometres, which only gave it 10 minutes flight time over London before having to return. On the other hand, the Bf 109 could fly higher than British planes.

Take-off weight	maximum 3,400 kg
Speed	maximum 640 km/hr
Range	600 km
Weapons	2 x 20-mm machine guns, additional guns, grenades and bombs
Crew	1 pilot who was also the gunner

FACT

BEST ENGINE

- The Daimler-Benz direct fuel injection engine provided the Bf 109 with an even supply of fuel during violent manoeuvres that the Spitfire's engine couldn't match.



Overall wingspan of around 10 m.

Oerlikon MG FF-machine gun.

Two MG 17 machine guns, each with 1,000 rounds.

Messerschmitt

Daimler-Benz engine with 1,175 horsepower.

Two guns, one on each wing, gave superior firepower.

The cockpit was cramped, and the pilots complained about poor visibility.

threw himself into the task with zeal: "The Führer has ordered me to crush Britain with my Luftwaffe", he declared proudly.

GERMANS ATTACKED RADAR STATIONS

Operation *Adlerangriff* (Eagle Attack) became the code name of a series of German raids designed to break the RAF. The first one came on 12th August, when a group of German bombers attacked radar stations on the south coast of England. Britain's radar system was one of the RAF's greatest assets. The attack knocked out several radar stations, and a few hours later, the Nazis sent around 220 bombers and fighters from southern Germany to bomb RAF airbases.

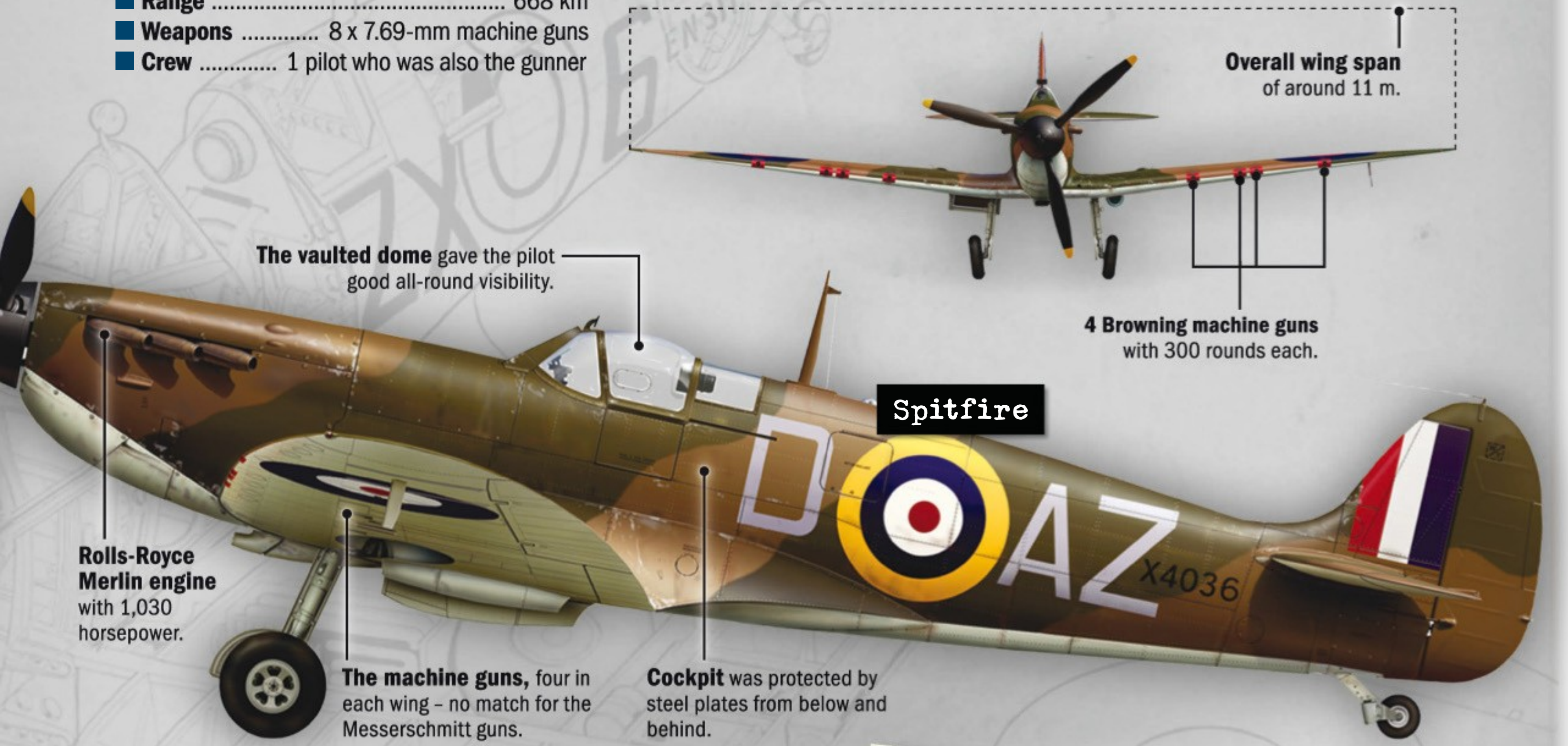
After a few hours the radar system was operational once again. The following day a fresh wave of bombers swept over the bases and more devastation followed. Both hangars and the planes inside were destroyed, workshops were flattened

Spitfire was an aerial acrobat

Rapid twists and turns in the air were the Spitfire's strength. The aircraft's wings were elliptical, resulting in great aerodynamics and manoeuvrability. If forced, the Spitfire could shake off its pursuant by rolling half a turn and then pulling out quickly from the subsequent dive.

Take-off weight	maximum 2,651 kg
Speed	560 km/hr
Range	668 km
Weapons	8 x 7.69-mm machine guns
Crew	1 pilot who was also the gunner

Goggles protected fighter pilots' eyes – for example, if the window in the cockpit was broken.



Overall wing span of around 11 m.

4 Browning machine guns with 300 rounds each.

The vaulted dome gave the pilot good all-round visibility.

Rolls-Royce Merlin engine with 1,030 horsepower.

The machine guns, four in each wing – no match for the Messerschmitt guns.

Cockpit was protected by steel plates from below and behind.

German fighter aircraft had the task of protecting bombers during their missions to Britain. The bombers didn't have enough firepower to defend themselves.

and the telephone system was put out of action. Runways were bombed, grounding the pilots. Göring was convinced that the British only had about 450 fighters left and that the Battle of Britain would be over in a couple of weeks.

Aviation industry was given priority

In fact, British aviation manufacturers had made sure that the RAF still had over 700 operational fighters. Having foreseen such a targeted air campaign, Churchill had established the Ministry for Aircraft Production three months earlier, in May.

The ministry ensured that the British economy was on a war footing and manufacturers of aircraft and related products were given priority access to most raw materials.

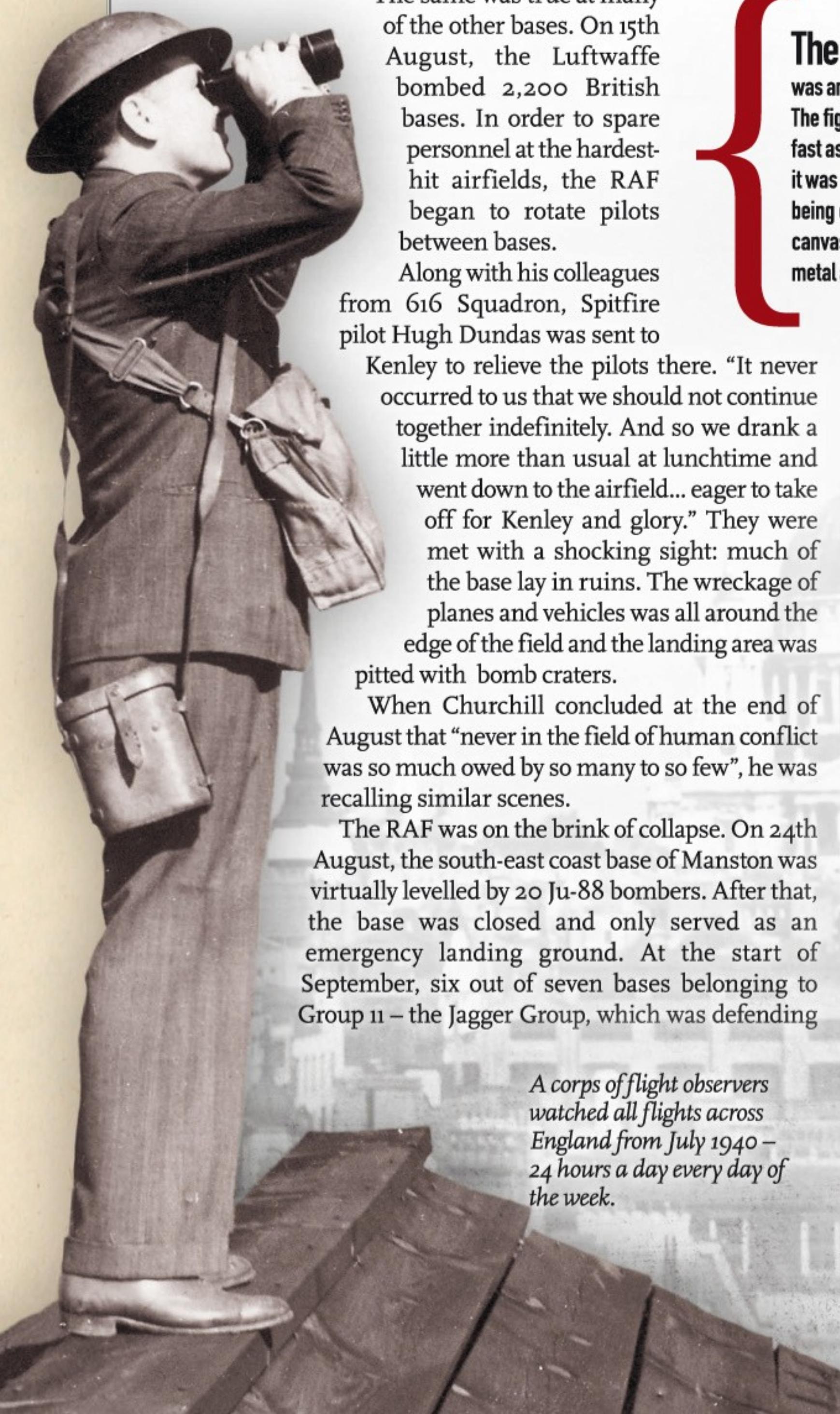
Private industries, not least the automotive sector, also contributed by providing equipment and assisting with the operation of state-run aircraft factories.

Aircraft production grew at record pace in Britain just as the German air industry, which wasn't prioritised in the same way began to see a drop in manufacturing figures. From June to September 1940, Germany built 775 new Messerschmitt aircraft, whereas Britain delivered 1,900 new fighters – almost three times the number. It was Britain's ramped-up production that would eventually see off Göring's Luftwaffe.

In mid-August, the Germans began to concentrate attacks on the main RAF airbases, including Tangmere on the south coast and Kenley and Biggin Hill just south-east of London. During the last two weeks of August, Biggin Hill was bombed almost daily.

Luftwaffe killed RAF's best pilots

For several weeks, British pilots at Biggin Hill were sent up time and again to defend against the German fighters. After days without sleep, they were exhausted, and fatigue began to sap at their concentration and fighting ability.



A corps of flight observers watched all flights across England from July 1940 – 24 hours a day every day of the week.

The same was true at many of the other bases. On 15th August, the Luftwaffe bombed 2,200 British bases. In order to spare personnel at the hardest-hit airfields, the RAF began to rotate pilots between bases.

Along with his colleagues from 616 Squadron, Spitfire pilot Hugh Dundas was sent to Kenley to relieve the pilots there. "It never occurred to us that we should not continue together indefinitely. And so we drank a little more than usual at lunchtime and went down to the airfield... eager to take off for Kenley and glory." They were met with a shocking sight: much of the base lay in ruins. The wreckage of planes and vehicles was all around the edge of the field and the landing area was pitted with bomb craters.

When Churchill concluded at the end of August that "never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few", he was recalling similar scenes.

The RAF was on the brink of collapse. On 24th August, the south-east coast base of Manston was virtually levelled by 20 Ju-88 bombers. After that, the base was closed and only served as an emergency landing ground. At the start of September, six out of seven bases belonging to Group 11 – the Jagger Group, which was defending London – were almost wiped out. British planes were also being shot down at an alarming rate. Within two weeks – from 26th August to 6th September – the RAF lost 273 aircraft, and despite factories operating at maximum capacity, production could not keep up.

More disastrous still was the loss of pilots. After just ten days at Kenley, Dundas had lost most of his original 12 colleagues from 616 Squadron: five were killed or were declared missing in action and another five were injured. At the start of the Battle of Britain, the RAF was only training 65 pilots a week, but it was losing around 120 pilots every week. It was a situation that couldn't be sustained for long. In the end, the shortage of pilots became so desperate that training for new recruits was cut to just four weeks. Unfortunately, the new, fast-tracked pilots were far less effective than the men they replaced. Records detailing the pilots' victories showed that 80 percent of enemy aircraft were shot down by just ten percent of the pilots – the most experienced ones.

The Hurricane **was an RAF workhorse. The fighter was not as fast as the Spitfire, but it was easier to produce being composed of a canvas skin over a metal airframe.**

Many of the new pilots were simply sent into the air with only the most basic knowledge of flying. They had not learned how to operate the aircraft's machine guns and only a few had learned to fly in formation. This meant the new planes tended to drop out of formation, becoming easy prey for German fighters.

The RAF's senior commanders knew that Britain would lose the battle if the Germans continued their current strategy. The Germans, were also losing planes and pilots, but they had more to start with and they were slowly gaining the upper hand, and the Luftwaffe could be forgiven for thinking the RAF was finished as a fighting force.

Hitler, however, was becoming impatient.

In retaliation for German bombers accidentally hitting London, the British bombed Berlin. The reprisals infuriated Hitler, because the Nazis had promised the German people that Berlin would never be attacked. He also believed that a change in strategy might force the stubborn British to surrender, which would allow him to focus on the Soviet Union. Rotterdam and Warsaw had shown what carpet bombing could do to a city – now it was London's turn.

Nearly a thousand German aircraft participated in the first attack, which came late in the afternoon on 7th September. The bombs hit the docks where a gasworks exploded in a huge fireball. The docklands were in flames. An ammunition depot and a residential area were also hit. 306 were killed.

"Explosions were everywhere, there just was not a break, bang after bang after bang," George Turnbull, a London home guard recalled. "The clang of bells from fire service vehicles and ambulances were drowned out by these bombs... God, this seemed to go on for hours."

The Luftwaffe bombed London daily for almost two months. The Blitz – as the attacks became known – hit hardest in the poor residential areas of London's East End.

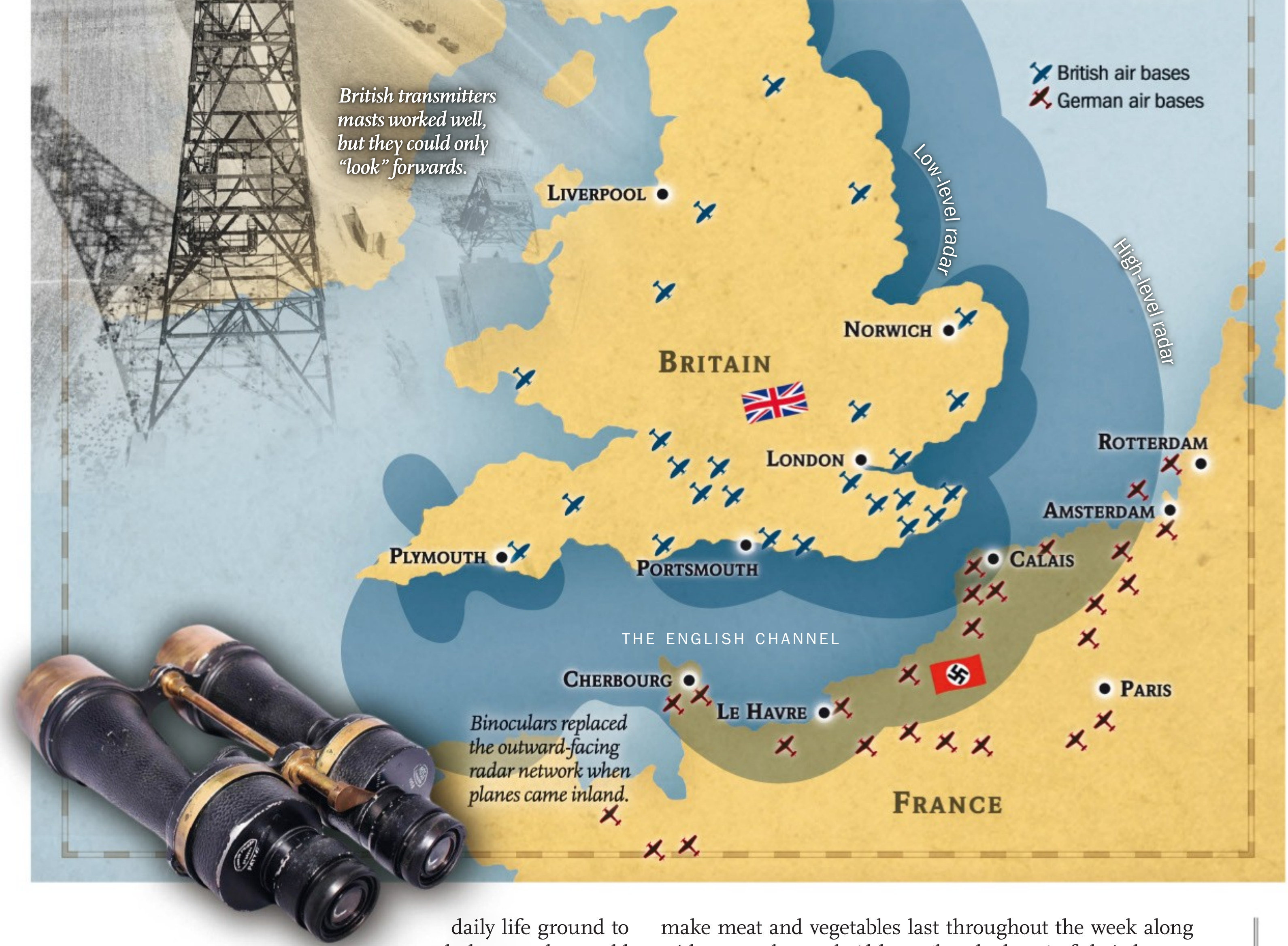
Britons were strong and united

East Enders were forced into crowded and dirty shelters, without toilets or sanitation. The government deliberately refused to build large, comfortable shelters as it dreaded the idea that people would want to stay in them permanently. If

British radar could see all the way to France

Both Britain and Germany used primitive radar, but, unlike the German system, the British radar system was connected to the Chain Home system, which made it highly efficient.

From the east coast of Scotland to the west coast of Wales 29 radar stations with tall transmitter masts 'bombarded' the space in front of them with radio waves to detect planes. The system had a range of over 80 km, so the British knew as soon as a German squadron took off from their bases in northern France. Radar determined the hostile aircraft's distance, altitude and speed. To prevent the enemy flying under the radar, low-level systems were developed that could detect aircraft at lower altitudes, albeit at a more limited distance. Once the planes reached Britain, observers followed them with binoculars. In cloudy weather, a plane's course and height were gauged from its engine noise.



British transmitters masts worked well, but they could only "look" forwards.

Binoculars replaced the outward-facing radar network when planes came inland.

daily life ground to a halt, morale would fall, or so the argument went. For the same reason, the government asked the press to write about parties and party gatherings in London and Churchill raged when he heard that well-off families had sent their children out of the city.

The hard-pressed residents of the East End continued their daily routine as well as they could – largely because they had no other choice. Over time, their disrupted days found new rhythms. Housewives swapped tips on how to make meat and vegetables last throughout the week along with news about who'd been 'bombed out' of their homes while queuing for their rations.

Folk came together in basements and on underground platforms during raids waiting for the 'All Clear' signal telling them that the streets were safe again – for now.

Even though casualties were high and the inhabitants were exhausted due to lack of sleep and rationing, the heavy bombing of the English capital didn't break British resolve as Hitler had hoped. After the first night's attacks, American newspaper journalist Edward Murrow wrote:

"This night bombing is serious and sensational. It makes headlines, kills people and smashes property, but it doesn't win wars ... [and] will not cause this country to collapse."

A MUCH-NEEDED BREAK

Murrow had read the situation correctly. The shift from bombarding airbases to civilian areas gave the RAF much-needed breathing room. The airbases were repaired, pilot numbers grew, and the industry was once again able to meet the force's demand for new aircraft. On 15th September, when the Luftwaffe arrived over London for what would prove to be the decisive battle of the air campaign against Britain, the skies were filled with Spitfire and Hurricane fighters.

The day was an unmitigated disaster for the Luftwaffe. A furious Göring blamed the fighter pilots, claiming they had let down the rest of the German air force.

Two days later, Hitler's Operation Sea Lion was postponed indefinitely. The nightly bombings of London continued over the coming months, but Germany really lost the Battle of Britain on 15th September. After October, the number of raids dropped, but they didn't stop completely until May 1941. By then the Blitz had taken more than 20,000 lives in London alone. Large parts of the city were devastated, and other cities across Britain were also affected. In total, civilian casualties across the country numbered close to 43,000 killed and 46,000 injured.

British morale and self-belief was boosted by the confrontation with the Luftwaffe. Britain was the first country to have resisted the modern German war machine – and shown that Hitler was not invincible, after all. Of course, Britain continued to be blockaded by German U-boats, warships and bombers who cut the country's supply lines, but she was an island fortress that had once again resisted invasion. With Churchill at the helm and sensible rationing of food and fuel, the British knew they could last for a long time.

Three years later, bombers came in their thousands again over southern Germany, only this time their pilots were British and their targets were German cities...

Ankle straps held a pilot's boots on his feet if he had to parachute from the plane.

London's volunteers worked night after night

A combination of voluntary fire workers, barrage balloons and British anti-aircraft guns kept up the morale of London's beleaguered citizens.

"Send all the bloody pumps you've got – the whole world's on fire", the message sounded when the first German bombs hit London's docks in the afternoon of 7th September. At the beginning of the Blitz in the autumn of 1940, the city's volunteer fire service numbered 25,000, many of them women.

In order to protect particularly vulnerable targets, the British set up barrage balloons. The large, silver-coloured balloons were tethered above the potential target by steel cables, which prevented bombers from flying at low altitude. Anti-aircraft guns were also set up alongside powerful search lights which picked out targets for the shooters. They weren't particularly effective, but the air-defence guns contributed to a sense of safety that helped reinforce morale.

Despite violent daily bombings, Londoners continued their daily lives as best they could.

The London Fire Service worked 24 hours a day to put out the many fires in the city.

Losses clipped Luftwaffe's wings

The 114-day battle over Britain cost the German Luftwaffe around half of its planes. Losses of the large Heinkel bomber were particularly high and proved difficult to replace.

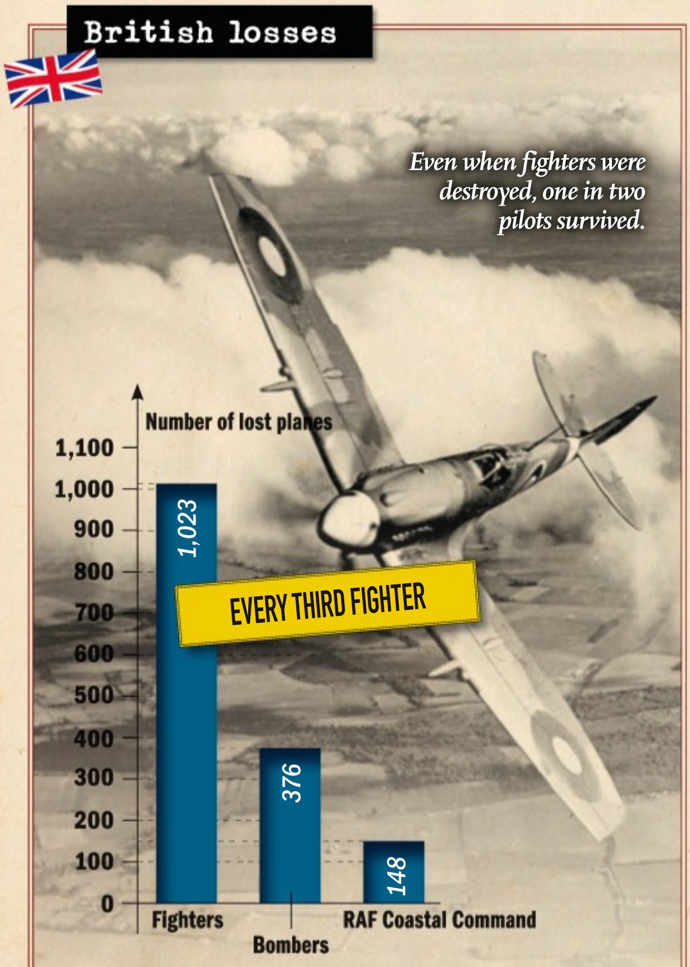
Luftwaffe's Heinkel He-111 was the Germans' strategic bomber at the start of the war.

The Battle of Britain was one of the most significant moments in recent military history. The RAF not only prevented an invasion of Britain, but convinced the United States that the country would be a reliable ally.

The RAF delivered an emphatic defeat to the Luftwaffe. The loss of so many German bombers put a damper on the German war effort for a long time to come. After its reprieve during the Blitz, the British were able to build new planes to replace lost ones, but the hard-pressed German air industry found it difficult to keep up.

During the Battle of Britain, the British built 2,354 new aircraft, while the Germans only managed 975. There was also a huge loss of lives, meaning Germany lacked pilots to fly the missions.

British losses



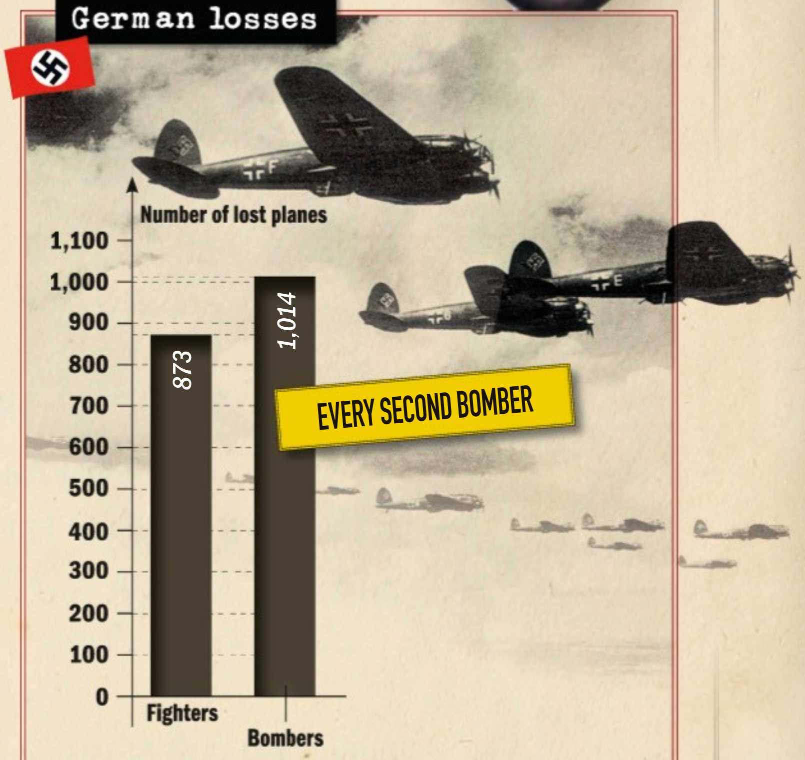
Even when fighters were destroyed, one in two pilots survived.

Total planes: 1,547 out of 1,963

Personnel: 537

Civilian loss: 43,000 killed
46,000 wounded

German losses



Total planes: 1,887 out of 2,550

Personnel: 2,662

Civilian loss: In principle none, because the battle took place over Britain, but British reprisal bombings cost a smaller number of German lives.

German bombers had four men on board. They rarely survived a crash.

1941

6th APRIL

About 15,000 German paratroopers participated in the invasion of Crete. But the cost in human life far exceeded German expectations.

CAMPAIGN IN THE SOUTH

BLITZKRIEG IN THE BALKANS

In the spring of 1941, Hitler's forces raced across Yugoslavia and Greece. The newly formed Axis powers' alliance subjugated the entire Balkan Peninsula in less than one month. Only Crete was still free, but the Germans had a new strategy to use there.

THE STAGE IS SET

The Italians have been trying to invade Greece from Albania for six months without success. The Führer decides to use his troops to break the deadlock and take the entire Balkan Peninsula. The move prompts a number of Eastern European states to join forces and, for the first time, the Axis powers unite in a permanent alliance.

Lieutenant Kurt Scheffel enjoyed the sunshine as he stepped out on to the damp grass at Arad airfield in western Romania. The sun had only just risen and its light illuminated the German aircraft lined up ready for the day's big mission.

Scheffel and his sidekick, Heinz Sellhorn, had arrived at the new airbase, which lay close to the border with Yugoslavia, just a few days earlier. It was Sunday, and the duo had spent the previous two days planning the day's attacks, and as many hours again in preparing the Stuka aircraft with the Luftwaffe's mechanics. The biggest task involved securing a 250-kilogram bomb to the underside of the plane's fuselage so that it could cause death and destruction when it was released over Belgrade in less than an hour's time. Hitler wanted the Yugoslav capital bombed on the first day of the Axis powers' big Balkan campaign.

As Scheffel and Sellhorn strolled out to their machine, they saw both old and new faces. Some pilots had flown with them over England, while others had come directly from the Luftwaffe's training camps in Germany and Austria.

151 dead

Hitler's losses were light during the campaign against Yugoslavia, but the invasion of Greece took a heavier toll, with around 8,000 Germans killed, most in Crete.

The experienced Scheffel settled into his accustomed seat behind the joystick and checked Sellhorn was ready at the machine gun behind him before turning the engine over.

At 07.00, machine after machine took to the air, first the Stuka dive bombers and then the Messerschmitt fighters. Ahead, Belgrade and a bloody Sunday awaited.

Mussolini annoyed Hitler

Germany's faithful ally Benito Mussolini had followed Adolf Hitler's success on the battlefield from 1939 until autumn 1940 with envy. Il Duce dreamed of a new Roman empire and invaded Albania on the far side of the Adriatic as early as spring 1939. Greece seemed to be next in the firing line, although the fascist leader denied having any such intent.

That all changed during the summer of 1940, when Mussolini received mistaken intelligence claiming that British warships were being refuelled inside Greek territory. At the same time, without consulting the Italian dictator, Hitler had begun negotiations with Romania, offering the country German protection if it joined the Axis powers. Mussolini felt snubbed, believing that political power plays in south-east Europe should be his purview. "Hitler always faces me with a fait accompli. This time I will pay him back in his own coin. He will read in the newspapers that I have occupied Greece," Mussolini told his foreign minister.

At dawn on 28th October, Italian troops crossed the Albanian-Greek border. A smug Mussolini personally conveyed the news to Hitler when he met him in Florence that same morning. Hitler concealed his displeasure and merely suggested that German forces could assist the Italians. Mussolini proudly refused.

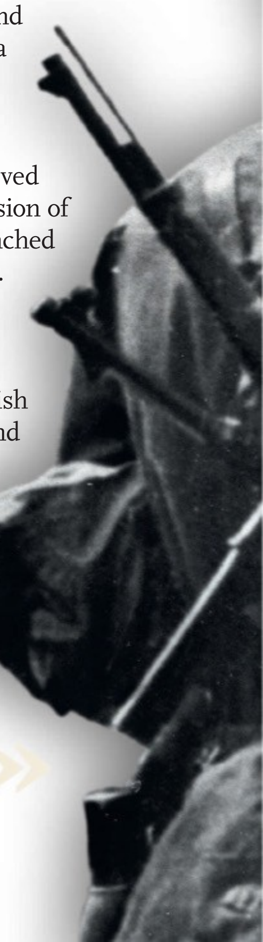
Hitler knew that a war in the Balkans was likely before he could go ahead with his planned campaign against the Soviet Union. He needed to secure the region to ensure that the Allies could not attack his flank. But Mussolini's meddling was problematic. The Germans were close to agreeing alliances with Hungary and Romania, while several other nations in south-east Europe, persuaded by both promises and intimidation, also looked set to join the Tripartite Pact, the Axis powers alliance consisting of Germany, Italy and Japan. Mussolini's sudden attack on Greece could upset the negotiations, and launching an offensive just before winter was a military blunder in anyone's book.

Greeks went on the offensive

Within a week, the Italian troops had proved themselves incapable of mounting a rapid invasion of Greece. By November, the Greeks had even launched a counter-offensive, forcing the Italians to retreat. At the same time, British RAF planes were allowed to land in an otherwise neutral Greece. Hitler's concern that an ineffective Italian attack would give the Allies the opportunity to establish themselves in the region was being realised, and in record time.

Disdaining Mussolini's claims that the Italians could succeed alone, Hitler issued Directive No. 20 in December, increasing German forces in Romania, with the aim of having them cross Bulgaria and take the coast north of the Aegean Sea and, if needed, the entire Greek mainland.

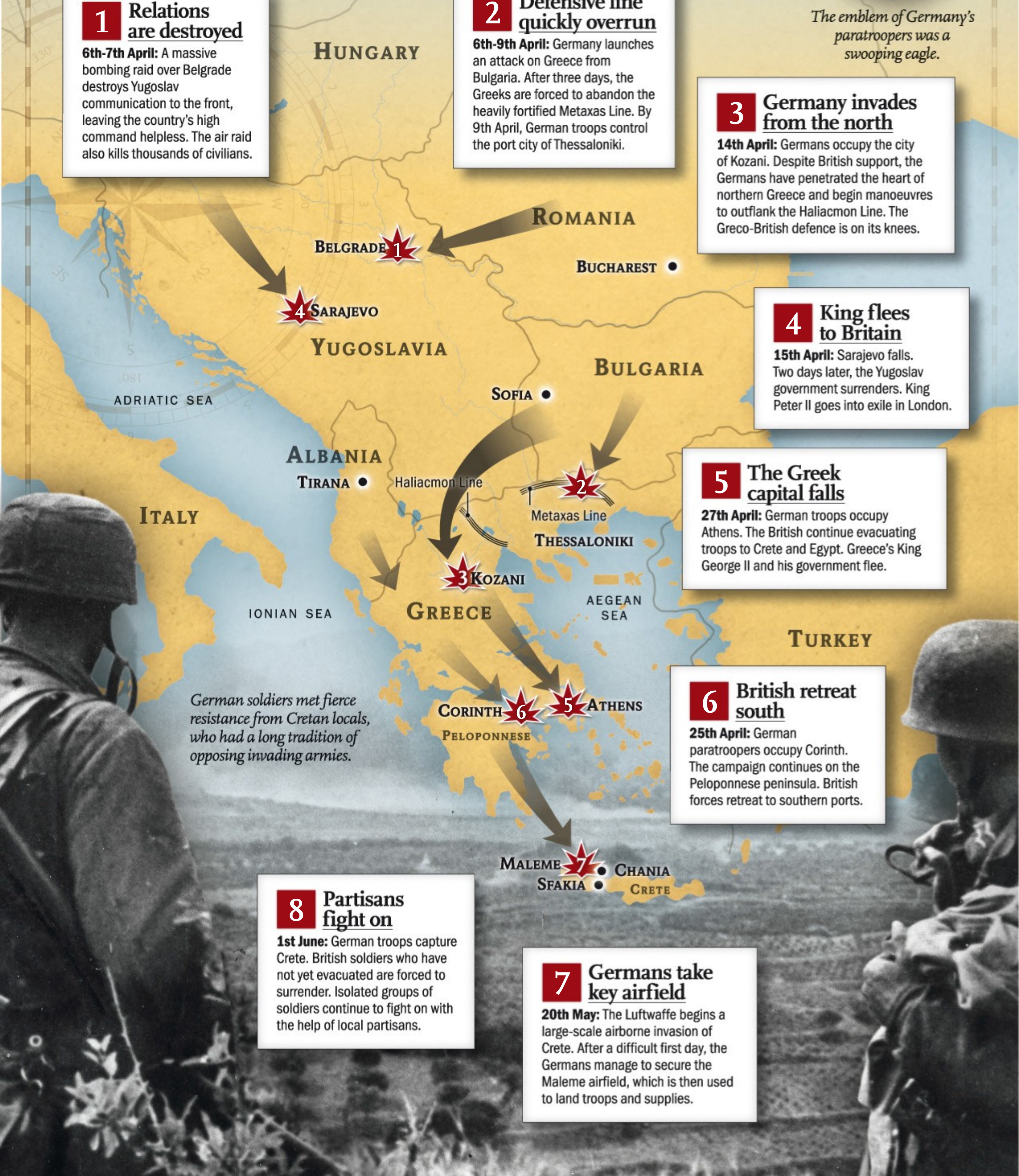
Hitler had to wait until 1st March 1941 before Bulgaria buckled under pressure and



Yugoslavia fell in 12 days

The campaign in the Balkans followed the familiar blitzkrieg formula, with bombers softening up ground targets ahead of a high-speed advance by armoured units. Internal factional strife in Yugoslavia made the Axis' task even easier.

The emblem of Germany's paratroopers was a swooping eagle.


HUNGARY
ROMANIA
BELGRADE
1
BUCHAREST
4
SARAJEVO
YUGOSLAVIA
BULGARIA
ADRIATIC SEA
SOFIA
ALBANIA
TIRANA
Haliacmon Line
2
Metaxas Line
THESSALONIKI
ITALY
3
KOZANI
IONIAN SEA
GREECE
AEGEAN SEA
TURKEY
CORINTH
6
5
ATHENS
PELOPONNESE
MALEME
7
CHANIA
SFAKIA
CRETE

1 Relations are destroyed

6th-7th April: A massive bombing raid over Belgrade destroys Yugoslav communication to the front, leaving the country's high command helpless. The air raid also kills thousands of civilians.

2 Defensive line quickly overrun

6th-9th April: Germany launches an attack on Greece from Bulgaria. After three days, the Greeks are forced to abandon the heavily fortified Metaxas Line. By 9th April, German troops control the port city of Thessaloniki.

3 Germany invades from the north

14th April: Germans occupy the city of Kozani. Despite British support, the Germans have penetrated the heart of northern Greece and begin manoeuvres to outflank the Haliacmon Line. The Greco-British defence is on its knees.

4 King flees to Britain

15th April: Sarajevo falls. Two days later, the Yugoslav government surrenders. King Peter II goes into exile in London.

5 The Greek capital falls

27th April: German troops occupy Athens. The British continue evacuating troops to Crete and Egypt. Greece's King George II and his government flee.

6 British retreat south

25th April: German paratroopers occupy Corinth. The campaign continues on the Peloponnese peninsula. British forces retreat to southern ports.

German soldiers met fierce resistance from Cretan locals, who had a long tradition of opposing invading armies.

7 Germans take key airfield

20th May: The Luftwaffe begins a large-scale airborne invasion of Crete. After a difficult first day, the Germans manage to secure the Maleme airfield, which is then used to land troops and supplies.

8 Partisans fight on

1st June: German troops capture Crete. British soldiers who have not yet evacuated are forced to surrender. Isolated groups of soldiers continue to fight on with the help of local partisans.

FACT

FASCIST AXIS IN EUROPE

- Mussolini proclaimed the "Rome-Berlin Axis" after Italy and Germany agreed a 19-point protocol in November 1936. The new allies were dubbed the Axis powers.
- The Axis was built around a common fascist ideology.
- Japan joined the Axis Powers via the Tripartite Pact in September 1940. Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria also belonged to the Axis and fought together in the first part of World War II.
- The Axis ceased to exist following Italy's capitulation in 1943.

The German army was received as liberators in many places, including in Maribor, Slovenia, close to the German border. Here the crowd greets Hitler during his visit on 26th April 1941.

NAME **WILHELM LIST**

TITLE FIELD MARSHAL

1880-1971

Field marshal felt Hitler's wrath

Despite planning the successful Balkan campaign, Wilhelm List never became a favourite of Hitler. He upset the Führer in 1931 while teaching at a military school in Dresden, where he rebuked some cadets who were supporters of the Nazi party. When List failed to win terrain as fast as Hitler would have liked in the war against the Soviet Union, he was dismissed and spent the rest of the conflict at home.

- **Fought in Poland and France.**
- **Sentenced for war crimes.**

joined the Tripartite Pact, enabling Germany's waiting divisions to cross Bulgaria towards the Greek border. Meanwhile, Hitler continued negotiations, this time demanding the right to march through Yugoslavia. Finally, on 25th March, Yugoslavia agreed and joined the Axis powers.

However, the accession to the Tripartite Pact aroused anger in the country, and two days later, a group of military officers successfully mounted a bloodless coup. They set up a national government, which signed a non-sovereign treaty with the Soviet Union, and opened discussions for a pact with Britain. Hitler was furious and immediately issued Directive No. 25: Yugoslavia would now share Greece's fate and be crushed as part of a magnificent offensive to take the Balkans.

"I have decided to destroy Yugoslavia," the Führer told senior officers at a meeting soon afterwards. The campaign was set to begin on 6th April 1941. Chillingly, the attack on Yugoslavia was named *Unternehmen Strafgericht* – Operation Retribution.

BLOOD FLOWED IN BELGRADE

As the clock approached 08.30 on the morning of 6th April, pilot Kurt Scheffel caught sight of Belgrade in the distance. Clouds of smoke billowed up from the many buildings that were already ablaze, showing where the first wave of German bombers had dropped its devastating payload 30 minutes earlier.

While German Heinkel and Dornier aircraft continued the bombardment of central Belgrade, Scheffel and Sellhorn flew on. Just south of the city, Scheffel pushed his joystick to the side, then forward, rolling the Stuka into its familiar dive. The plane's nose pointed downwards at an 80-degree angle, and the wind-driven siren at its tip, the Jericho trumpet, began its infernal howl. Through the cockpit's windscreen Scheffel could see his goal, the royal palace, which grew larger second by second. 1,800 metres... 1,600 metres... 1,400 metres: the altimeter rattled down and the speedometer passed 500 km/h. At

The aerodynamic design of the M1935 parachute helmet reduced air resistance.

around 1,000 metres, Scheffel released the aircraft's 250-kg bomb, initiating an automatic levelling of the plane's trajectory. As the bomb thundered toward its target, Scheffel calmly climbed to 3,000 metres, while in the rear, Sellhorn watched for enemy aircraft jinking through the airspace around them, his finger never leaving the machine gun trigger. The Yugoslavs didn't have many planes in the air, however, and the return trip was peaceful.

The situation in central Belgrade, on the other hand, was far from quiet. The air strike had come unexpectedly and many civilians had been hit by rubble and shards of metal as they scrambled to take cover in air-raid shelters and cellars. Many with fractured bones and open flesh wounds were left praying for someone to rescue them. Other Yugoslavs had been inside buildings hit by the bombs and had either been killed outright or were lying crushed, with broken bones, beneath the rubble. All around them they could hear the roaring death machines as they continued to ravage the city.

The horrors also troubled some German pilots who had seen the Balkan city being flattened from the air.

"We returned and I had the feeling that we had participated in something distasteful. When I landed, I was concerned because I had seen houses burn and was aware of the disaster that the attack must have been for the civilians," German pilot Richard Hausmann said.

German troops take time out to snap an ancient monument as they blast through Greece.

Although the 400 bombers and 200 fighters involved in the bombing had primarily military targets, such as government buildings, communications facilities and military headquarters, civilian casualties were inevitable. Most historians today estimate that the total number of civilians killed was around 3,000, although some estimates are as high as 17,000.

For the Luftwaffe, however, the bombing campaign was a success. A significant part of Yugoslavia's already inferior air defence had been destroyed, and the attack had cut all communications to and from the capital. The hard-pressed defence forces at the border could no longer call for help.

The weak army was overrun

That same morning, ground forces had invaded Yugoslavia from all sides. German and Italian troops attacked from the north, Germans and Hungarians from the east, and Italians from the south via their territories in Albania. Although the Yugoslav army numbered nearly one million soldiers, they were poorly armed and trained, and thinly spread along the border. Moreover, the Balkan empire was deeply divided: the Croatian region was more interested in independence than in fighting Hitler, which did not help overall morale.

It took the Axis forces just 12 days to take Yugoslavia using standard blitzkrieg tactics, with bombers smashing the main installations, before a rapid advance by armoured and infantry units. On the evening of 17th April 1941, the Yugoslav commander signed the country's unconditional surrender.

The collapse of Yugoslavia was portrayed as a great triumph in Germany, where images of victorious soldiers flickered across the nation's cinema screens. The announcer for *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* (*The German Weekly Review*) newsreel claimed that "The annihilation of Serbia is another huge achievement of the German Wehrmacht, of which we can be proud. The world's best soldiers secured victory in the shortest possible time!"

The attack against Greece – Operation Marita – began on the same day as the Axis powers bombed Belgrade: 6th April. Field Marshal Wilhelm List led the attack, which saw German armoured and infantry units break through well-established Greek lines of defence in the north of the country. One section of the German army was ordered to penetrate from western Bulgaria through southern Yugoslavia and attack the Greeks from there, while other forces would invade Greece directly via southern Bulgaria. Meanwhile, the Italians continued to occupy Greek forces along the Albanian border, where the war had raged since Benito Mussolini's invasion attempt in late 1940.

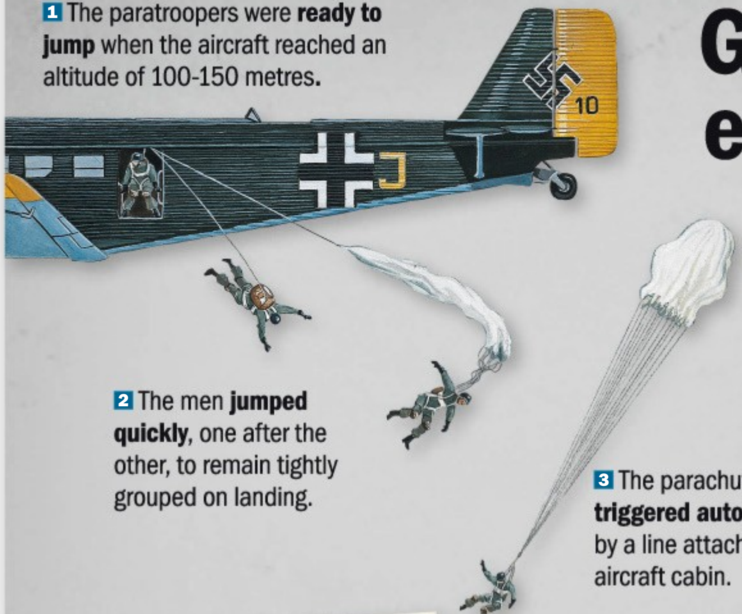
Northern Greece's mountainous terrain made the attack physically demanding. German engineers had to reinforce and widen the steep, cobbled mountain passes to

German engineers construct an emergency bridge to replace one blown up by retreating Allied forces.

PARACHUTES

Germans jumped from extremely low altitude

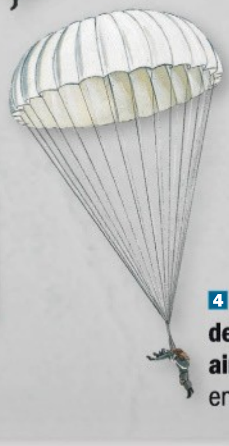
Paratroopers were easy targets in the air. That's why the Germans jumped as close to the ground as possible. Despite this, a huge number were killed.



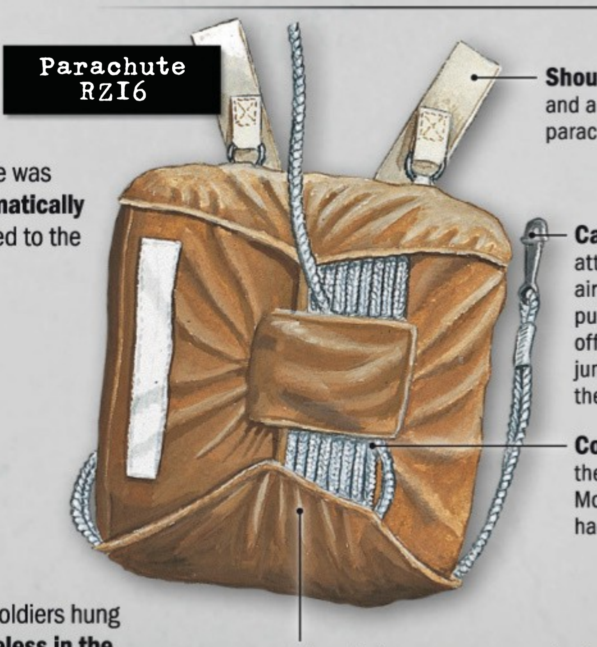
1 The paratroopers were **ready to jump** when the aircraft reached an altitude of 100-150 metres.

2 The men **jumped quickly**, one after the other, to remain tightly grouped on landing.

3 The parachute was **triggered automatically** by a line attached to the aircraft cabin.



4 The soldiers hung **defenceless in the air**, vulnerable to enemy gun fire.



Shoulder straps and a belt held the parachute in place.

Carabiner was attached to the aircraft and pulled the bag off when the man jumped, triggering the parachute.

Cords secured the silk chute. Most models had 14 cords.

Parachutes were supposed to help Germans reach the ground safely, but they could not be controlled manually and were difficult to detach.

The head of airborne troops called Crete "the grave of the German paratroopers".

accommodate the Nazis' heavy vehicles. Still, the Germans won terrain surprisingly quickly, despite the north-eastern mountain ranges being defended by fortifications, such as the Metaxas Line – a sturdy defensive structure, inspired by the French Maginot Line, with bunkers, tunnels and forts.

Mountain troops were vital

Sending Stukas to bomb these defences was ineffective: the Metaxas Line forts had air-defence domes and anti-aircraft guns, which limited the potency of air attacks. Instead, the Germans did what the Greeks thought impossible: specially trained mountain units crossed the range at an altitude of 2,100 metres. Although it was April, the peaks were still covered with snow, but despite the difficult conditions, the elite troops succeeded in crossing the range and quickly managed to capture a section of the line's fortifications, punching a hole in the defensive structure. As a result, the Germans overcame the Metaxas Line after just three days.

330,000
Serbian soldiers were imprisoned after Yugoslavia's surrender. By contrast, Croatian soldiers, many of whom had deserted to the Germans, were released.

On 9th April, Greece's II Army Corps, which had been tasked with defending the entire north-eastern region of Greece, was forced to admit defeat and capitulate. On the same day, the first German divisions drove into Thessaloniki without encountering any resistance – thereby capturing a key port on the Aegean Sea. But the Greek tragedy had only just begun.

Blitzkrieg swept Allies aside

Along with several Antipodean divisions, Winston Churchill sent around 60,000 British soldiers to reinforce the 400,000 or so Greek troops already defending the country.

Still, the fight was uneven. The Allies faced an army of 1.2 million Axis soldiers, which had six times the number of aircraft available and more than ten times the number of tanks. The German troops who had attacked Greece via southern Yugoslavia had barely met any resistance along the way and were now barrelling towards central Greece. On 18th April, the Greeks, British, Australians and New Zealanders had to withdraw from the northern lines of defence.

The following day there was a crisis meeting in Athens with King George II of Greece as well as the leading Greek and British generals. With the country's strong fixed

The Allies had parachutes that could be controlled during a jump.

Western powers stole parachute tactics

While the Germans chose to completely abandon paratroopers after the heavy casualties of Operation Merkur, the Allies were inspired by the new style of attack.

The invasion of Crete was the first time paratroopers had been deployed in large numbers, but the strategy cost the lives of almost 7,000 Germans soldiers. The transport planes had to fly low and slow, resulting in many being shot down. The paratroopers were equally vulnerable as their parachutes signalled their slow descent towards the ground. And the danger didn't end when their feet touched the ground: it took around 80 seconds to detach the parachute. Operation Merkur's huge losses made the Luftwaffe abandon large-scale airborne attacks.

Conversely, the Allies decided to adopt the new tactic. They had noted the success of smaller German parachute operations in Norway and France in 1940, and had created their own airborne forces as a result. The Allied units first saw action during the invasion of French North West Africa in November 1942. Airborne forces also played a major role in attacks staged during 1944, not least the D-Day landings.

The above badge was awarded to British soldiers who passed a 12-day course to become paratroopers.

defences out of commission, the situation seemed bleak – and hopes tumbled further when news of Yugoslavia's rapid collapse and surrender reached the Greek capital. The Greeks' message to the British was both honest and clear:

"You have done your best to save us. We are finished. But the war is not lost. Therefore save what you can of your Army to help to win elsewhere."

But the Luftwaffe ruled the sky above Greece, and evacuation was no easy matter. Luckily for the British, there were a number of moonless nights, which enabled the waiting Allied battalions, who hid from Luftwaffe during the day, to sneak aboard Royal Navy ships under the cover of darkness. By 30th April, around 50,000 Allied soldiers had been transported from mainland Greece. By that point, the Greek forces had finally given up, knowing that further resistance would only cause the Axis powers to bomb the country's major cities.

Yugoslavia became a patchwork blanket of territories after the country was divided between the victorious Axis powers: Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria.

Hitler could add yet another successful blitzkrieg campaign to his growing list of victories. The Balkans had been occupied in just three weeks of fighting and Britain had been expelled from the continent. But Hitler was missing the last bite of the Greek cherry: Crete. The Allies still had troops stationed on the island, which lay 100 km from the mainland – too close for Hitler's comfort.

PARACHUTES DESCENDED OVER CRETE

Churchill wanted to hold on to Crete because of the island's central location between the fighting arenas in Europe and North Africa. Crete could provide shelter for the Royal Navy, which would make life difficult for the Axis powers' supply ships in the Mediterranean. Hitler placed the same value on Crete and therefore launched Operation Merkur, which brought a new form of strategic attack to the table: the Greek island would be captured courtesy of history's first large-scale airborne attack.

As the clock neared 08.00 on 20th May, 150 German Stuka aircraft flew over the Greek archipelago. On sighting Crete, the pilots plunged one by one towards the island's anti-aircraft batteries along the north coast and at the three main airfields. The deadly bombs ripped many of the guns apart, provoking a hail of return fire as the defenders tried to down the killer machines. But the familiar scene changed with the next wave of German planes that swept across Crete. This time the payload was not bombs. Instead, more than 2,000 paratroopers descended from the sky like snowflakes. Equally silent were the gliders, each with 10 men, which flew above the large Greek island.

The Allies were amazed at the sight, but soon came to their senses and began aiming their guns at the slowly dropping paratroopers. They made easy targets. The German intelligence service had estimated that only around 10,000 soldiers were in Crete, but in reality the figure was nearer 42,000. In addition, thousands of Cretan civilians let loose on the Germans with their own firearms and, in some cases, with scythes and shovels. Assessing the failure afterwards, the Germans concluded that the bombers' initial attack had failed to neutralise enough hostile positions, resulting in heavy casualties.

However, the German high command, along with the paratroopers' senior commander, Kurt Student, insisted on winning the battle and dropped another 11,000 paratroopers on Crete the next day. Thanks to further air raids, the German troops on the island managed to recover the situation over the following days. Scheffel and Sellhorn swept across the island in their Stuka on the 26th and 27th May, taking out the Allies' last anti-aircraft gun.

On 28th May, Crete's commander, Major General Bernard Freyberg, realised that the island could no longer be defended and ordered an evacuation of all remaining personnel across the Cretan mountains and on to Royal Navy ships waiting on the south coast.

However, Scheffel and Sellhorn had no intention of letting the enemy escape. With other aircrews, they watched the Mediterranean like hawks and dived to attack British ships on sight. Such dives weren't without their dangers – the ships all had anti-aircraft guns – but Scheffel and Sellhorn succeeded time and again. By 31st May, they, along with the other Stuka crews, had sunk three cruisers, six destroyers and 29 smaller vessels. The sea around Crete had been cleared of British ships and Greece was in the hands of the Axis powers.

GERMANS SEEMED INFALLIBLE

The success of Germany's blitzkrieg tactics worried the Allies. Hitler had succeeded in pushing several Balkan states into his Axis alliance by demonstrating how easily his army could crush nations that did not accept his terms. The British had lost their footing on the European continent and, in some quarters, confidence in an eventual victory was beginning to waver – especially as the Allies were being pushed back every time they encountered the seemingly infallible Germans.

Hitler promoted this idea of German infallibility and superiority at every opportunity, and was quick to capitalise on the way that his forces had quickly subdued and captured the Balkan states that had tried to defy him. In a speech made shortly after the fall of Greece, he said: "I am looking to the future... with unshakable confidence. The German Reich and its allies represent militarily, economically and also morally, a power superior to any possible coalition in the world."

Partisans were split

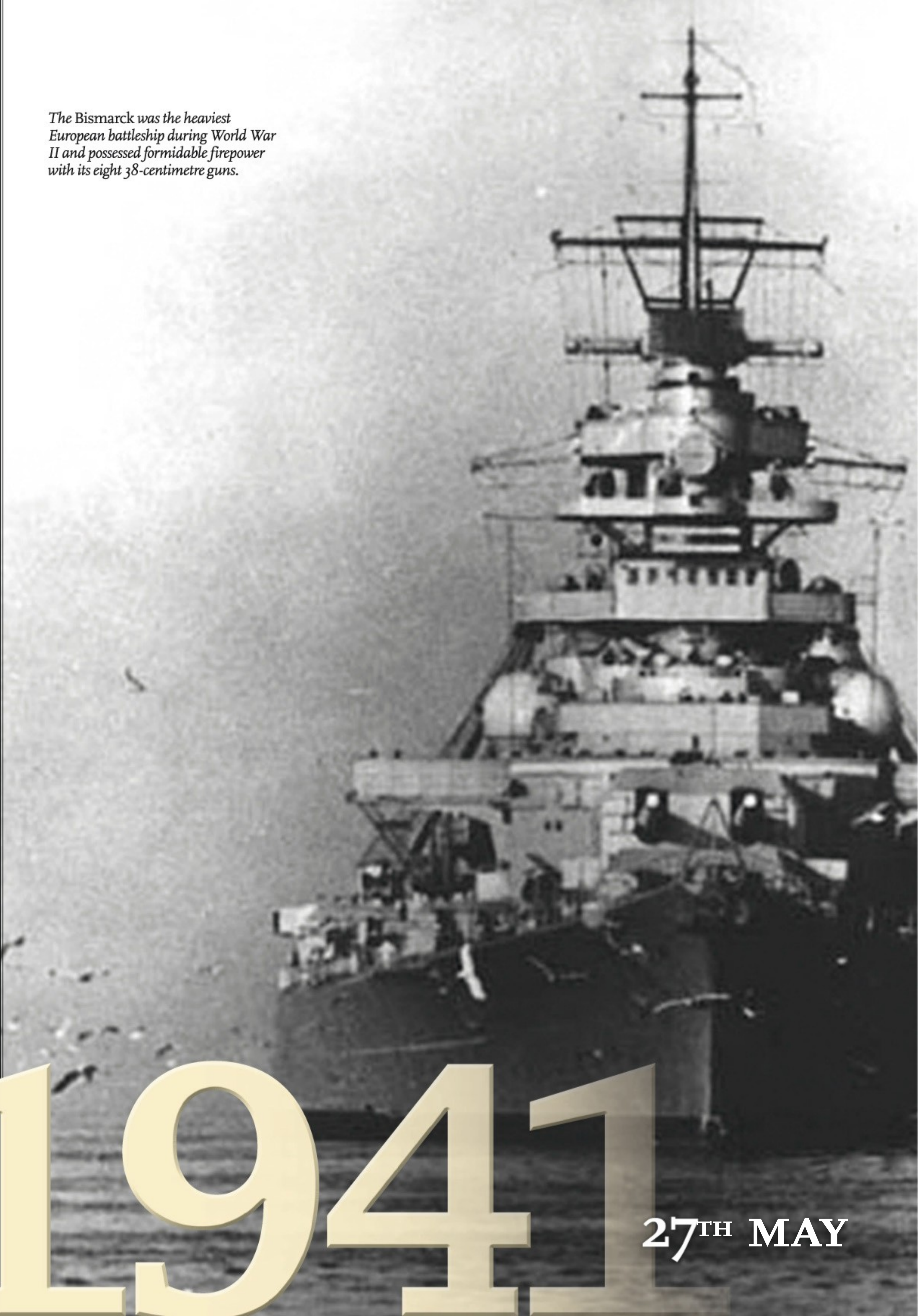
Many Yugoslavs gathered in the mountains after the country was occupied. They became some of the strongest resistance groups of the war.

In 1944, Hitler created a special badge to honour those fighting the partisans.

Although the Axis occupied Yugoslavia in just 12 days, the inhabitants' fighting spirit was far from broken. During the war, resistance in the country became the strongest in Europe, and by 1943, the partisans had liberated half of Yugoslavia's former territory. Hitler was forced to send half a million extra soldiers to the country in response, but the reinforcements had little effect.

Unfortunately, the various partisan groups strongly disagreed with each other and spent as much energy on fighting one another as they did on combatting the Germans. There was particular animosity between the Chetniks (Serbian royalists) and Josip Tito's communists. However, Tito did more to thwart Nazi goals and therefore received greater support from the Allies. In 1944, his partisans liberated Belgrade just hours before the Red Army arrived. In total, 1.7 million Yugoslavs died in the war. Of those, one million were killed by their own countrymen.

In Yugoslav communist resistance groups, women were equal to men.



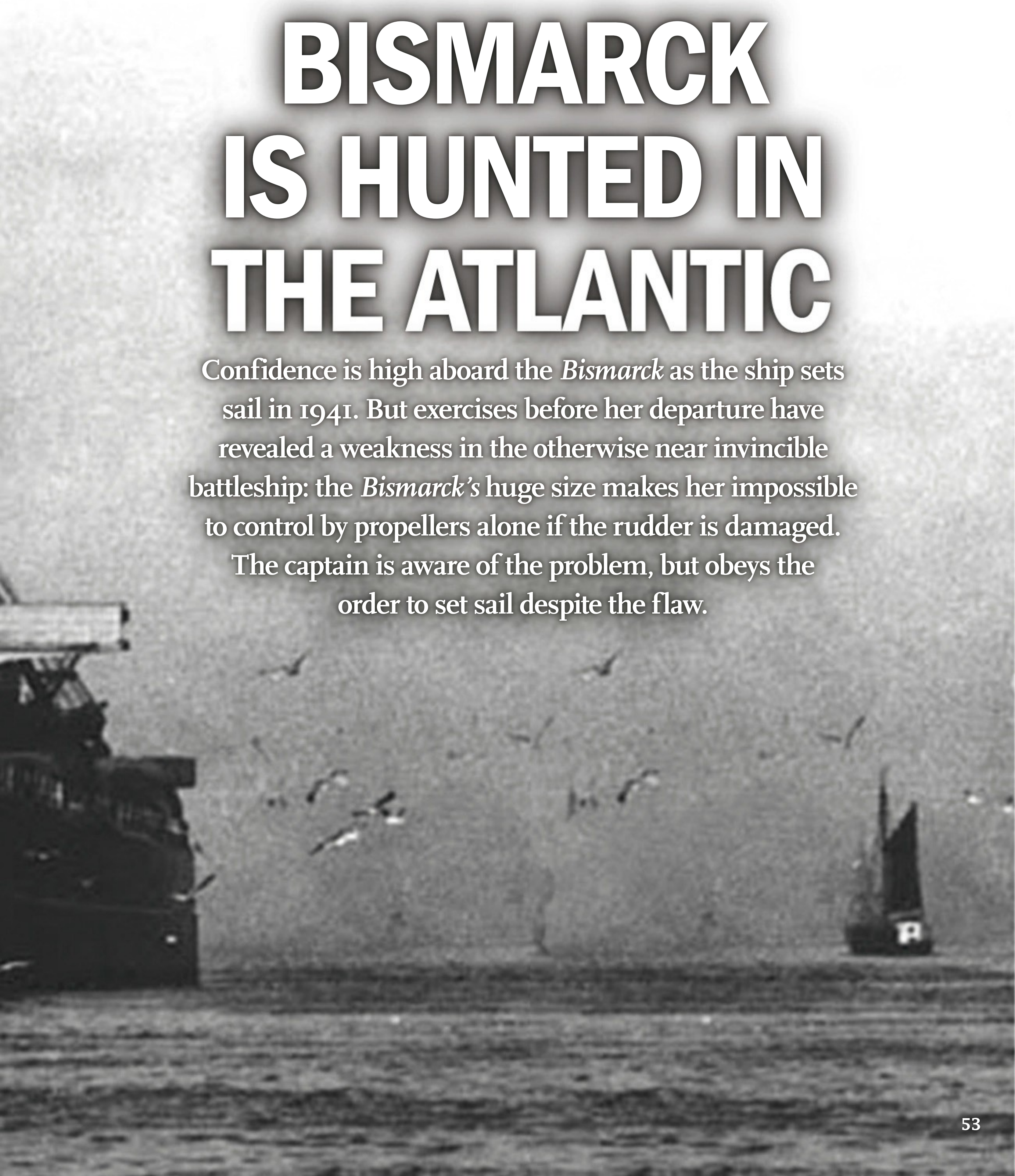
The Bismarck *was the heaviest European battleship during World War II and possessed formidable firepower with its eight 38-centimetre guns.*

1941

27TH MAY

BISMARCK IS HUNTED IN THE ATLANTIC

Confidence is high aboard the *Bismarck* as the ship sets sail in 1941. But exercises before her departure have revealed a weakness in the otherwise near invincible battleship: the *Bismarck's* huge size makes her impossible to control by propellers alone if the rudder is damaged. The captain is aware of the problem, but obeys the order to set sail despite the flaw.



North Atlantic 1941

THE STAGE IS SET

Iceland
Britain

When she sets sail for her first mission in the spring of 1941, the German's brand-new battleship, the *Bismarck*, is one of the most powerful in the world. The British know that the mighty vessel will pose a severe threat to Allied convoys if she reaches the Atlantic and will do anything to stop her.

150,000 horsepower was provided by the *Bismarck's* 12 large boilers, the equivalent of c. 100 artillery tanks. Power came via three large-bladed propellers.

THE BATTLESHIP *BISMARCK* BASKED in the May sun as she lay in the Norwegian Grimstad Fjord. On deck, 30-year-old Lieutenant Baron Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg, was one of the carefully selected crew members assigned to sail on the new vessel, the pride of Germany's navy. He was convinced that the *Bismarck*, which was under the captaincy of Ernst Lindemann, could handle any mission.

The two German Messerschmitt fighters that circled the ship as a defence against British bombers increased his sense of security. Throughout the day, the *Bismarck* had been visited by military personnel admiring the Third Reich's sleek naval engineering. The ship's first gunnery officer, 37-year-old Adalbert Schneider, proudly showed his brother around the ship. "We're stronger than anything faster and faster than anything stronger," he said before adding, "Our assignment is just like life insurance."

It was 21st May 1941, two days after the *Bismarck* had set sail as part of Operation Rheinübung. The mission was being overseen by Admiral Günther Lütjens, who was also aboard the *Bismarck*. Its objective was to sail undetected into the Atlantic with the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* to sink as many of Britain's vital supply convoys as possible. The convoys had an escort of British warships, but they would be defenceless against the *Bismarck's* superior firepower.

At 13.00, an air siren broke the day's quiet. Air defence teams were put on high alert, but when no planes appeared, it was assumed to be a false alarm. The crew breathed a sigh of relief.

High above, the British pilot whose plane had triggered the warning was already on his way home with pictures of the *Bismarck* and the *Prinz Eugen*. The images confirmed Swedish intelligence: the *Bismarck* had left its port in occupied Poland. The cruisers *Norfolk* and *Suffolk* were immediately ordered to patrol the Denmark Strait between Iceland and Greenland, and three cruisers were sent to guard the waters between Iceland and the Faroe Islands. The mighty battle cruiser *Hood*, the battleship *Prince of Wales* and six destroyers patrolled the waters south of Iceland.

The following evening a reconnaissance plane returned with important news: the Germans had left Norway. HMS *King George V* set out from Scotland, accompanied by the aircraft carrier *Victorious*, four cruisers, three destroyers and the old battle cruiser *Repulse*. The hunt had begun.

HIDING IN THE FOG

The following day, 23rd May, the *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* sailed at high speed down the Denmark Strait. On the

There was a sense among the crew – which numbered around 100 officers and 2,100 seamen – that the ship was almost invincible.

starboard side, blue-white pack ice glistened before a backdrop of towering Greenland glaciers. To port, a heavy haze masked the horizon towards Iceland.

The scenery was so beautiful that Müllenheim-Rechberg found it hard to tear himself away from the view, but the idyll was broken abruptly at 18.11, when the alarm sounded: the *Bismarck*'s hydrophones had detected vessels to starboard, but it was another false alarm. At 19.22 the bells rang again, this time signalling a contact on the port side. Moments later, the silhouette of a massive superstructure with three stacks slipped past them in the fog: it was the HMS *Suffolk*.

The British cruiser turned as the *Bismarck* sped away and began tailing the German ship at a safe distance. At 20.30, the alarm sounded again. The *Bismarck*'s radar had detected another British cruiser, the *Norfolk*, ahead. The Germans' guns flashed as they fired, but the British laid down a smokescreen and disappeared quickly into the fog only to reappear behind the two German ships shortly afterwards.

The recoil from the huge guns had put the *Bismarck*'s forward radar out of action. The *Prinz Eugen*, which had no radar problems, was ordered to switch places and take over the lead position. The *Bismarck*'s more powerful guns could now cover the two enemy ships tailing them. Müllenheim-Rechberg, who was ordered to the rear gunnery to observe the enemy vessels, soon discovered that neither speed nor concealment were enough to shake their pursuers. The *Bismarck* raced through the bright Arctic night at almost 30 knots, constantly changing course and seeking shelter in any available fog bank, but the British were equipped with highly efficient radar. The hunt went on all night, and aboard the *Bismarck* concerns mounted about which other ships may have been alerted.

1894-1941

NAME **ERNST LINDEMANN**

TITLE CAPTAIN

Leader was popular with his men

Ernst Lindemann had worked his way up through the German naval ranks and was well liked by his crew because of his friendly and caring manner. The captain preferred to refer to the *Bismarck* as 'he' rather than 'she', as he thought the ship was too powerful to be female.

- **Joined the fleet in 1913.**
- **Became the ship's captain in 1940.**

1889-1941

NAME **GÜNTHER LÜTJENS**

TITLE ADMIRAL

Reserved admiral refused to 'heil'

The tight-lipped Lütjens was in command of Operation Rheinübung on the *Bismarck*, which led to friction with Lindemann. Lütjens was also at odds with the high command: he refused to give the Nazi salute when Hitler toured the *Bismarck* before her departure.

- **Decorated in World War I.**
- **Made full admiral in 1940.**

Ships attacked like angry bulls

At 05.45 the answer came: first two columns of smoke appeared against the brightening horizon to the south-east, then two masts. Looking through a director rangefinder, Müllenheim-Rechberg could soon see the complete silhouette of two large warships, thundering towards the *Bismarck*. They reminded him of charging bulls, totally blind to what they were up against. At 05.53 the distance was down to 20 kilometres, and suddenly he saw a gigantic flash of light from the ships. The enemy had opened fire.

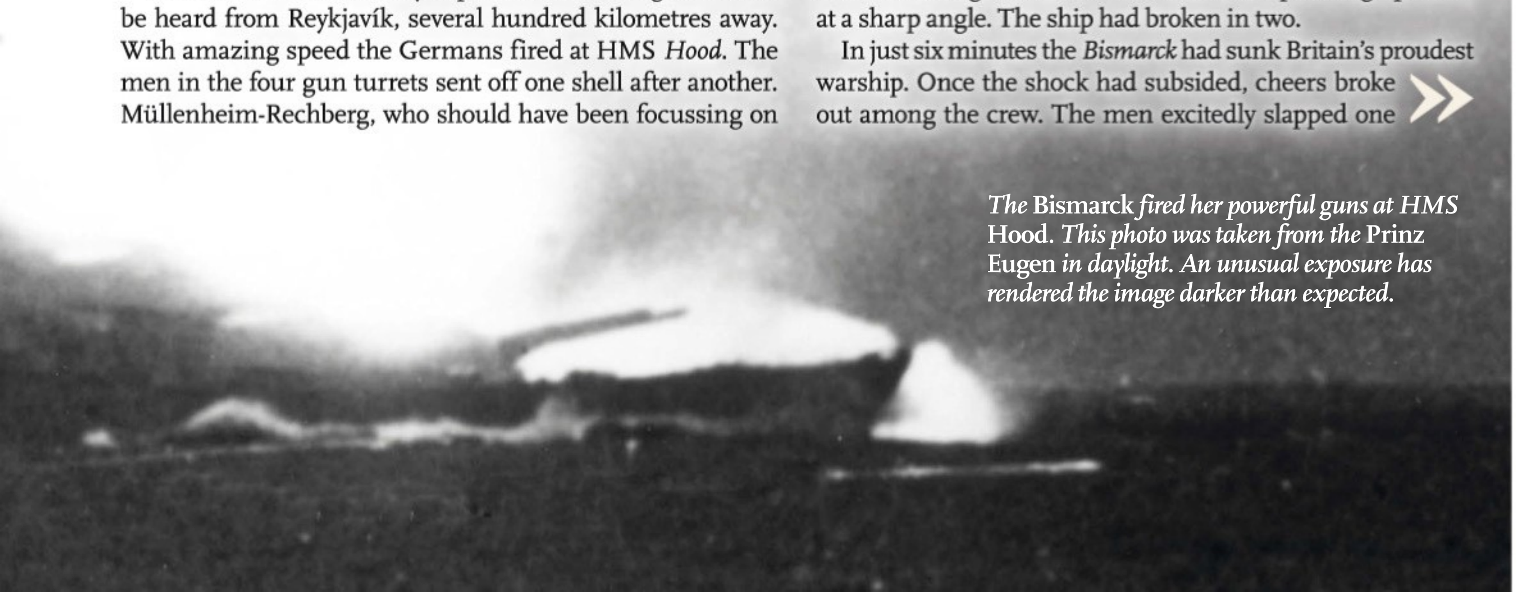
Britain's largest warship, the *Hood*, was heading directly for the *Bismarck*, with salvoes bursting from her guns. The Germans couldn't have asked for a more worthy opponent.

The *Bismarck*'s first volley exploded with a bang that could be heard from Reykjavík, several hundred kilometres away. With amazing speed the Germans fired at HMS *Hood*. The men in the four gun turrets sent off one shell after another. Müllenheim-Rechberg, who should have been focussing on watching for a possible attack from the two British cruisers behind, had a hard time keeping his eyes off the exchange.

British pride sinks below the waves

When First Gunnery Officer Schneider calmly announced that "the enemy is burning", it was too much for Müllenheim-Rechberg: he handed over rearwards surveillance to a subordinate and rushed over to look through the port director facing the *Hood*. While he searched for the British battle cruiser, he heard the cry, "She's blowing up!" The men aboard the *Bismarck* looked at one another in disbelief. When Müllenheim-Rechberg finally trained his rangefinder on the *Hood*, all he could see was a column of black smoke, and at its foot something incredible: the *Hood*'s bow pointing upwards at a sharp angle. The ship had broken in two.

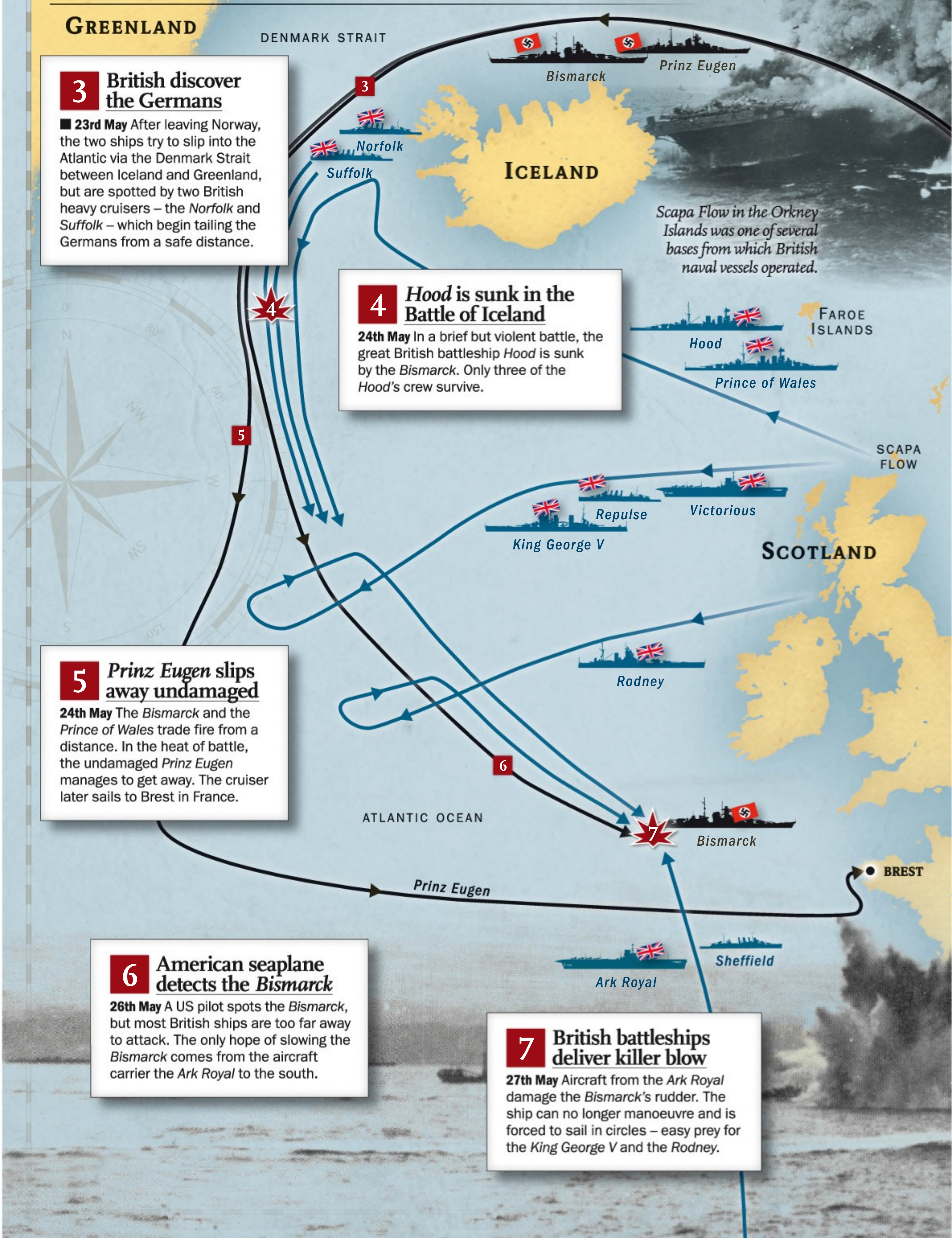
In just six minutes the *Bismarck* had sunk Britain's proudest warship. Once the shock had subsided, cheers broke out among the crew. The men excitedly slapped one



The Bismarck *fired her powerful guns at HMS* Hood. *This photo was taken from the* Prinz Eugen *in daylight. An unusual exposure has rendered the image darker than expected.*

Hungry pack hunted the Bismarck

The German ship was shadowed by destroyers and monitored by aircraft. Despite her speed, the *Bismarck* never managed to escape the Royal Navy.


GREENLAND
DENMARK STRAIT
Bismarck
Prinz Eugen
3
Norfolk
Suffolk
ICELAND
4
FAROE ISLANDS
Hood
Prince of Wales
5
SCAPA FLOW
Repulse
Victorious
King George V
SCOTLAND
Rodney
6
ATLANTIC OCEAN
7
Bismarck
BREST
Prinz Eugen
Sheffield
Ark Royal

Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands was one of several bases from which British naval vessels operated.

3 British discover the Germans

■ **23rd May** After leaving Norway, the two ships try to slip into the Atlantic via the Denmark Strait between Iceland and Greenland, but are spotted by two British heavy cruisers – the *Norfolk* and *Suffolk* – which begin tailing the Germans from a safe distance.

4 *Hood* is sunk in the Battle of Iceland

24th May In a brief but violent battle, the great British battleship *Hood* is sunk by the *Bismarck*. Only three of the *Hood's* crew survive.

5 *Prinz Eugen* slips away undamaged

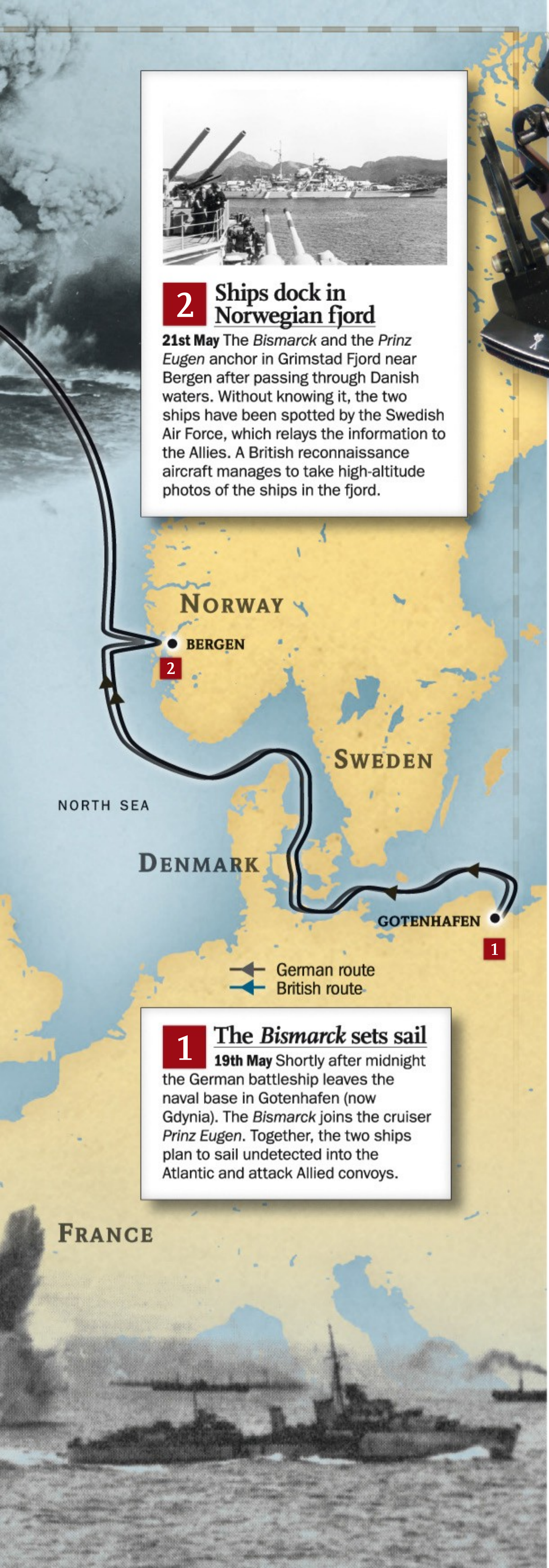
24th May The *Bismarck* and the *Prince of Wales* trade fire from a distance. In the heat of battle, the undamaged *Prinz Eugen* manages to get away. The cruiser later sails to Brest in France.

6 American seaplane detects the *Bismarck*

26th May A US pilot spots the *Bismarck*, but most British ships are too far away to attack. The only hope of slowing the *Bismarck* comes from the aircraft carrier the *Ark Royal* to the south.

7 British battleships deliver killer blow

27th May Aircraft from the *Ark Royal* damage the *Bismarck's* rudder. The ship can no longer manoeuvre and is forced to sail in circles – easy prey for the *King George V* and the *Rodney*.

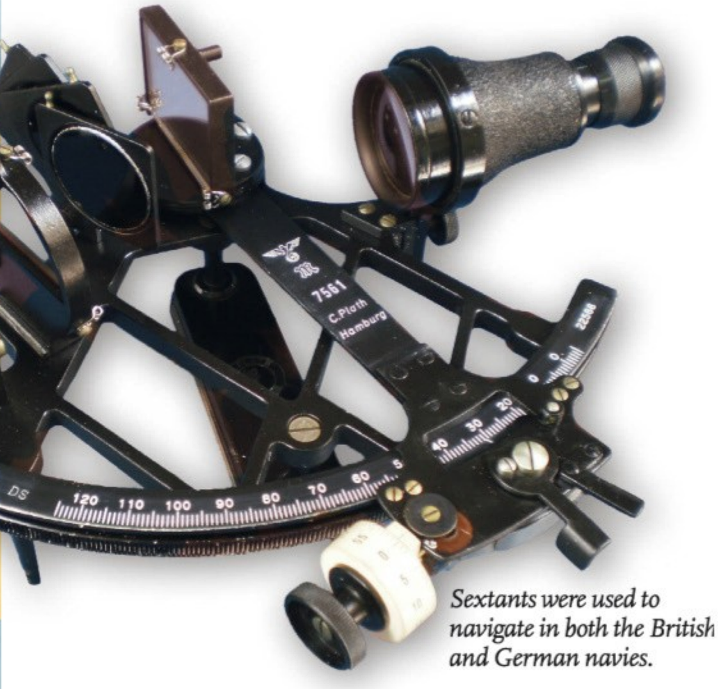


2 Ships dock in Norwegian fjord

21st May The *Bismarck* and the *Prinz Eugen* anchor in Grimstad Fjord near Bergen after passing through Danish waters. Without knowing it, the two ships have been spotted by the Swedish Air Force, which relays the information to the Allies. A British reconnaissance aircraft manages to take high-altitude photos of the ships in the fjord.

1 The *Bismarck* sets sail

19th May Shortly after midnight the German battleship leaves the naval base in Gotenhafen (now Gdynia). The *Bismarck* joins the cruiser *Prinz Eugen*. Together, the two ships plan to sail undetected into the Atlantic and attack Allied convoys.



Sextants were used to navigate in both the British and German navies.

another on the back. What a ship they had! They'd almost forgotten that the battle was not yet over. The *Bismarck* could now tackle the battleship *Prince of Wales*, which *Prinz Eugen* had been shelling throughout. But before long the admiral gave orders to cease firing, much to the crew's disappointment. The *Prince of Wales* was allowed to sail away wounded. Only three seamen out of *Hood's* 1,418-man crew survived. The loss of the national symbol was a shock to the British.

Churchill's orders came quickly and were brusque and uncompromising: "I don't care how you do it, you must sink the *Bismarck*." Anything that could sail and fire was sent in: four battleships, two aircraft carriers, two battle cruisers, three heavy cruisers, 10 light cruisers and 21 destroyers.

The *Bismarck* had already been hit three times, however. One of the shells had bounced off, but another had pierced the ship's bow and left a half-metre-wide exit hole. The third shell had punched a hole amidships, and the *Bismarck* was now leaving a trail of oil behind her. 2,000 tonnes of seawater had flooded in causing the ship to list slightly to starboard and her bow was lower in the water. The holes had to be plugged with hammocks to prevent more water entering.

PILOTS' DEATH-DEFYING ATTACK

On 24th May, after an inconsequential, early-evening skirmish with a new pursuer, the *Prince of Wales*, it was announced aboard the *Bismarck* that an aircraft carrier was nearby, a message that put the anti-aircraft stations on high alert. By this time, the *Bismarck* was alone apart from the three enemy ships that were now trailing it. The *Prinz Eugen* had escaped the British to continue Operation Rheinübung, while the *Bismarck* sailed towards a French dock for repairs.

At 22.30, with the North Atlantic spring evening still as bright as day, the *Bismarck* sounded her air alarm. Müllenheim-Rechberg watched through his director as nine small Swordfish biplane torpedo bombers approached obliquely from the front.

In an instant the *Bismarck* transformed into a fire-breathing steel monster. Anti-aircraft guns thundered endlessly. Occasionally, the 15-cm and 38-cm turrets aimed at the sea's surface, sending up huge plumes of water into the path of the British aircraft, but the pilots continued with suicidal bravery "as if they did not expect ever again to see a carrier", Müllenheim-Rechberg noted. Each came within 400-

500 metres of the *Bismarck* before releasing their payloads. One by one, the torpedoes hit the water. The *Bismarck* sped up to 27 knots and zigzagged hard, making it virtually impossible for the gunners to hit the aircraft.

Then a sharp report sounded above the *Bismarck*'s guns. A torpedo had hit them. Müllenheim-Rechberg checked his instruments, but the engines and rudder were unharmed.

The torpedo had hit midships on the starboard side – where the *Bismarck*'s armour was strongest. The explosion caused no damage, but the concussion slammed an officer into a solid structure, killing him instantly. It was the first death aboard the *Bismarck*. Six others were treated for fractures.

As the Swordfish vanished over the horizon, the news of the death brought home to the crew how alone and vulnerable they really were, and how close the enemy was. They had sunk the *Hood*, but the victory had only spurred the British to bring everything they could to bear against the *Bismarck*.

Seaplane revealed position

At 11.30 on 26th May, the 2,200 or so men aboard the *Bismarck* had been alone on the Atlantic Ocean for more than 30 hours. As the hours passed, hope that they'd manage to escape their British pursuers grew.

Müllenheim-Rechberg was aware, however, that danger was still imminent. They had a chance but only if the *Bismarck* retained her manoeuvrability. Then a Catalina seaplane emerged from between the clouds.

"Aircraft to port! Aircraft alarm!"

The *Bismarck*'s anti-aircraft guns fired at the seaplane, but it escaped, apparently unharmed. Now, the crew was no longer in any doubt: the British knew the *Bismarck*'s position. The lieutenant took solace in the fact that the Catalina had probably come alone and from afar, and that it would be a long time before the British could gather enough battleships to threaten the *Bismarck*'s attempt to dock in France.

Second air attack was decisive

His hope soon faded. Half an hour later a plane with landing gear appeared; an aircraft carrier was nearby. Crew morale sank. The biplane circled just beyond the anti-aircraft guns' range. In the afternoon it was joined by another Catalina, and that evening the British cruiser HMS *Sheffield* arrived.

But the lack of any attack, followed by the subsequent disappearance of her pursuers, gave the Germans fresh hope. Rumours abounded on the ship: the enemy's main strength was more than 100 miles behind – perhaps the aircraft carrier was also too far away to attack? Examining the charts, some of the men calculated that the *Bismarck* might be within protective range of the Luftwaffe by the following morning.

In fact, a mix-up among the British over the German ship's bearing had allowed the *Bismarck* to lose her tail. Many of the British ships who had been following from the start had been forced to abandon the chase due to a lack of fuel, and the chance of ships catching the *Bismarck* who could compete with her huge guns was slim. The only danger for the German vessel came from the south and the approaching aircraft carrier, HMS *Ark Royal*. Her Swordfish planes' torpedoes could slow the *Bismarck* or cripple her manoeuvrability, allowing the British ships to catch up.

"Aircraft alarm!"

On deck, the crew watched as 16 Swordfish biplanes flew past the *Bismarck* at high altitude, then reappeared, this time diving towards the ship. The *Bismarck*'s guns opened up once more, but Müllenheim-Rechberg could see how the pilots continued undaunted, dropping one torpedo after another into the sea around the *Bismarck*. The entire ship lurched violently from side to side while Captain Lindemann manoeuvred to avoid the weapons.

Müllenheim-Rechberg listened for a torpedo blast to pierce the noise of the *Bismarck*'s guns. Two sharp explosions sounded in rapid succession, but they'd hit the forward section where the armour was strong.

Moments later a third blast could be heard. A British pilot had dropped his torpedo directly aft of the *Bismarck* just as the ship was making an evasive turn to port. The torpedo almost instantly struck the *Bismarck* where it was most vulnerable:

Ship was a floating city

Sailors aboard the *Bismarck* enjoyed a wide range of facilities, including a steam laundry and a modern dental clinic.

When the *Bismarck* set sail on her first – and final – mission, the ship brought enough supplies to feed the crew for several months. The refrigeration area below deck had room for 500 slaughtered pigs and 300 entire cows, and the meat was brought up to the big galleys using an ingenious hoist system. The crew of the Bismarck did not need to suffer with toothache, either, as the ship had its own dental clinic.

Ship's dentist Rolf Hinrichsen demonstrates his equipment for the photographer. It's not known if anyone visited the dentist during the voyage.

A sailor on the Prinz Eugen *signals the* Bismarck *with flags in order to maintain radio silence.*

Bismarck

Length	251 metres
Width	36 metres
Weight	50.955 tonnes
Top speed	31 knots (57 km/h)
Main weapons	8 x 38-cm guns 12 x 15-cm guns
Crew	2,212

SEA MONSTER WAS IMMENSE

When the *Bismarck* set sail on her maiden voyage, the ship was the most formidable in the world: it had strong weaponry, was heavily armoured and extremely fast. Her range was also huge – around 16,000 kilometres, almost half way around the Earth.

HMS Hood

Length	262 metres
Width	32 metres
Weight	48.360 tonnes
Top speed	29 knots (53 km/h)
Main weapons	8 x 38-cm guns 12 x 14-cm guns
Crew	1,418

PROUD SHIP HAD ONE WEAK POINT

The *Hood* was a symbol of the British Empire's naval power during in the interwar period. But she had one weak point: her deck armour was relatively thin. The weight savings afforded her greater speed, but also meant that the ship was vulnerable to shells landing from above.

the rudder. The lieutenant's heart sank. He looked instinctively at the rudder position indicator. It was frozen at "left 12 degrees".

DAMAGE WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO REPAIR

The *Bismarck* fired on the *Sheffield*, which had crept closer during the Germans' battle with the Swordfish, succeeding in scaring her off, but the rudder's position indicator had still not moved: the *Bismarck* had lost her ability to steer. Lindemann fired off orders to attempt to regain control using a combination of the engines and propellers, but to no avail.

Slowly, the *Bismarck* was forced into the wind and into an involuntary semicircle. A repair team tried unsuccessfully to free the rudder mechanism. But it quickly had to give up as the space filled with water.

John Tovey, an English admiral, praised the *Bismarck* and her crew for having managed to attack in almost impossible circumstances and for fighting to the last.

With the *Bismarck* now sailing away from her former course towards France, the British realised that the ship must have been seriously damaged. They seized the opportunity. The *King George V* and the *Rodney* sailed north-west of the *Bismarck*, planning to approach under cover of darkness and attack at dawn.

During the night of 27th May a strong north-west wind blew up into a storm, and the waves rose to 15 metres high. The crew's last-ditch attempt to repair the damaged rudder was abandoned around midnight. The wind and the high waves relentlessly pushed the ship off course.

Rain lashed down over the *Bismarck* as a group of British destroyers fired torpedoes towards the stricken vessel, which returned fire with volleys from its guns – but neither side's salvoes were effective. Meanwhile, Admiral Lütjens sent a message to fleet command. He knew that the battle was lost, but surrender was not an option. Parts of the communication between the *Bismarck* and naval command were read out over the speakers on board:

"Fleet Commander to the Führer of the German Reich, Adolf Hitler: We will fight to the last in belief in you, my Führer, and in unshakeable confidence in Germany's victory".

The reply came soon after: "Adolf Hitler to crew of the *Bismarck*: All of Germany is with you. What can be done, will be done. Your performance of duty will strengthen our people in the struggle for its destiny".

For the crew, it sounded like a death sentence rather than a rallying cry. The *Bismarck* was promised assistance from German tugs and bombers, but Müllenheim-Rechberg knew they couldn't arrive in time. When the ship's commander gave the crew permission to take what they wanted from the ship's stores, he knew that Lütjens and Lindemann had decided that the situation was hopeless.

Time passed without a renewed British attack. As the clock ticked around to 08.00, Müllenheim-Rechberg decided to make a last round of the ship. In the wardroom, men sat morosely around the table. One spoke: "Today my

Only 115 out of the Bismarck's *crew of over 2,100 were saved before British ships fled, fearing German U-boat reprisals.*

wife will become a widow, but she doesn't know it." Müllenheim-Rechberg left the sorry group to visit the bridge. Exhausted men were all around, and in the middle of it all was Captain Lindemann – wearing an open life jacket. The lieutenant saluted, but the usually jovial captain did not even glance back. He seemed petrified.

On the way back to his post, Müllenheim-Rechberg met Admiral Lütjens and saluted. Lütjens returned the greeting, but without conviction. The lieutenant looked at his watch. It was after 08.30 – where were the British?

The executioners came at dawn

Suddenly, the alarm bells rang. Müllenheim-Rechberg ran to the aft gunner's station and picked up the control phone.

"Two battleships, port bow", a voice said. He turned to his rangefinder and saw the unmistakable silhouettes of the *King George V* and the *Rodney*, about 24 kilometres away and heading straight for the *Bismarck*. They looked as impassive as a pair of executioners.

At 08.47 the first salvoes were fired from the British ships, and minutes later the *Bismarck* returned fire. But the British were firing rapidly and shells rained down on the German vessel.

After just 20 minutes the *Bismarck*'s two forward turrets were shot to pieces, but the aft pair remained intact. Müllenheim-Rechberg was ordered to take charge of them. The defence was now in his hands. He scanned the horizon for targets with his rangefinder. Around 11 kilometres away, he saw the *King George V*.

"The target is the battleship at 250 [degrees]", he reported to the calculation room deep beneath the turrets. "Ready," was the answer. "One salvo," he ordered. The shells whistled through the air and struck the right side of the British battleship. Another salvo further to the left and then another. The shells struck the water directly in front of the *King George V*. The direction had been found, only the distance was missing.

British shells still rained down on the *Bismarck*, and suddenly Müllenheim-Rechberg's rangefinder shook so violently that the eyepiece slapped him hard in the face. When he recovered, he tried to look into the rangefinder once more, but there was nothing to see. Just as he was about to find his range, the rangefinder had broken. A British shell had ripped through all the instruments in the aft fire control centre, reducing it to a useless steel box. The lieutenant had no choice but to let the men in the turrets fire as best they could. Outside there was chaos.

Layers of dead men

The constant British shelling had transformed the *Bismarck* into a blazing wreck of death and mutilation. The lifeboats had been shot to pieces long ago. In despair, some of the crew jumped into the water, while others ran around the deck in a hopeless panic. Here and there, the ship's doctors dashed between the wounded sailors, trying to help.

Deep down in the starboard engine room Petty Officer Wilhelm Generotzky had noticed the reduction in the thunder from the *Bismarck*'s guns, but was pleased that none of the enemy's shells had penetrated the armoured deck above him.

"It's over!" shouted the second mate, the colour gone from his face. The ship was listing increasingly towards port, and soon the

OTTO VON BISMARCK

The Bismarck *was named after the chancellor who united Germany in 1871.*

surviving officers gave the order: "Scuttle ship." It was time for the crew to abandon the vessel.

Generotzky climbed from the depths through a shaft as one of the last in a group of 40 men. When he reached the ladder's top rung and could place his hands on deck, they landed in pools of blood. On the shattered deck were piles of dead and dying men, three or four layers deep.

In the officers' mess, men had smashed the necks off schnapps bottles and were swallowing the contents, even as blood ran from the cuts made by the glass's sharp edges. Some had fallen to the floor, senseless.

The British continued to lob shells onto the ship, while a dismayed Generotzky tried to find shelter. At 10.21, the sound of murderous shell fire finally stopped.

Müllenheim-Rechberg waited a little longer before he ordered the men who had sought refuge in his fire control centre to leave the ship. He was the last to leave his post.

Outside he met a gruesome sight: white smoke had started to emerge from the fires below decks, shrouding most of the bow. The tower mast and foremast protruded above the smoke and men stumbled aimlessly around. The chimney had a hole in it, and the entire deck was covered with twisted metal. Where once there had been guns and instruments, there was now nothing. The lieutenant struggled over metal fragments and holes in the deck to the starboard side of the stern.

For a long time, he and a small group of men waited for rescue boats to arrive – but the sea was empty. Finally, there was nothing for it but to jump before the *Bismarck* sank and sucked them into the depths alongside her.

Around Generotzky things became more and more desperate as the *Bismarck* went down: some officers shot themselves, while others jumped into the water.

"She's sinking!" someone shouted, and at that moment the deck almost disappeared under Generotzky's feet. The entire starboard side rose into the air, and then he jumped into the water, too. When he finally emerged from the depths 100 metres from the sinking giant, he saw the whole ship lying keel up. Then, with a gurgling sound, she disappeared under the waves.

Captain stayed with his ship

Only 115 of the *Bismarck*'s crew survived. Among them were Müllenheim-Rechberg and Generotzky, both of whom were picked up by British ships. First Gunnery Officer Adalbert Schneider died a few minutes into the fighting. Later, Müllenheim-Rechberg wrote the book *Battleship Bismarck: A Survivor's Story* about his experience.

The cruiser *Prinz Eugen* continued her journey, but had to abandon the mission because of engine trouble after a few days. The ship managed to reach the safety of Brest in German-occupied France on 1st June 1941.

Admiral Lütjens was killed by a shell on the *Bismarck*'s bridge, while Captain Lindemann went down with his ship. His men saw him standing in the bow to the last. When the *Bismarck* keeled over, he climbed onto the hull and saluted until he was swallowed by the depths.

PERSPECTIVE

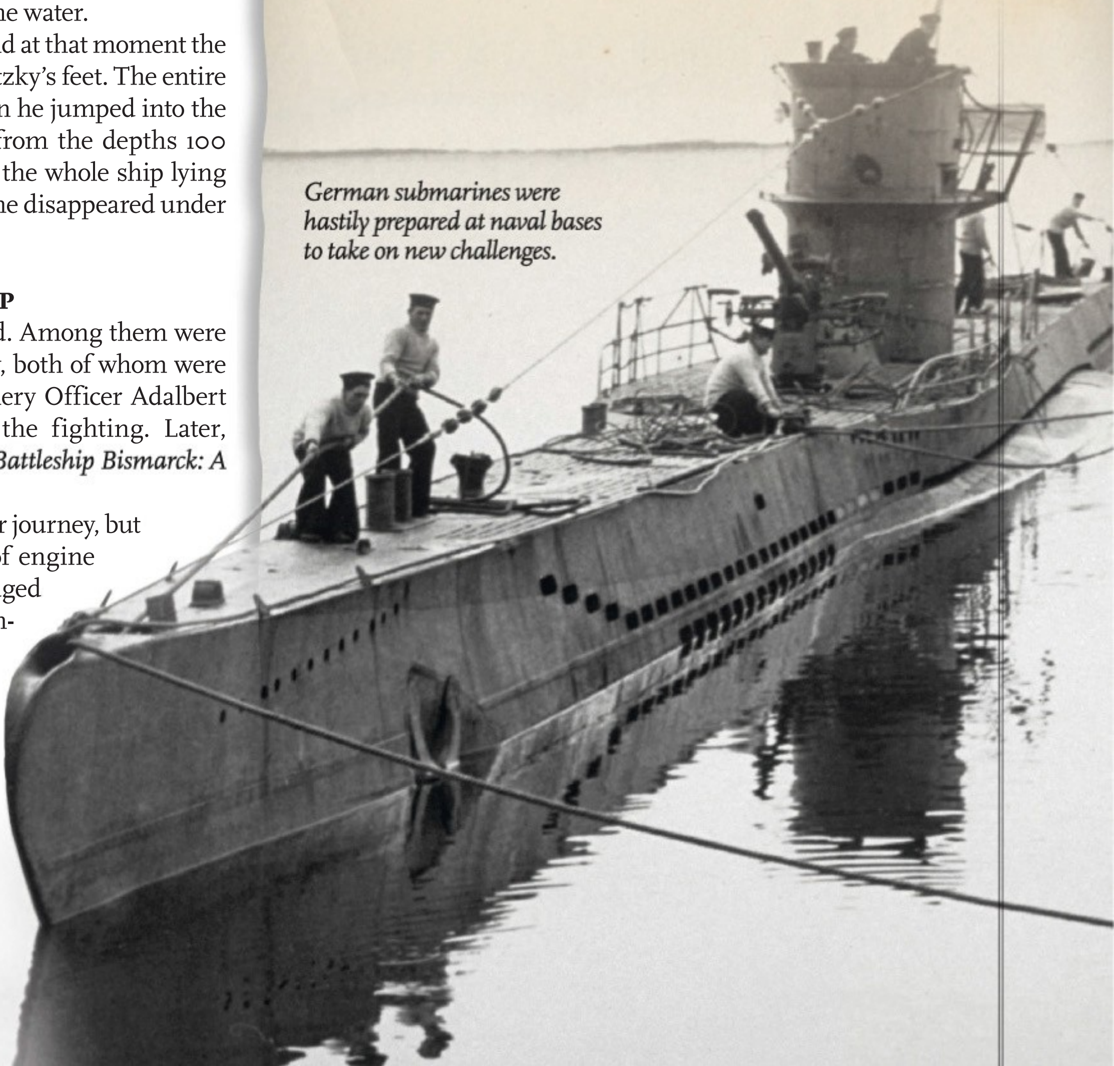
Germans went underwater

After the *Bismarck's* demise, the Germans had no chance of dominating conventional naval warfare. Instead, the Nazis turned to U-boats.

As an island nation and long-time naval power, Britain was determined to control the seas – it was the only way she could guard against a German invasion and protect vital convoys of supplies and soldiers, especially from the US and Canada.

After the sinking of the *Bismarck*, it was difficult for the Germans and their allies to threaten British vessels with surface attacks. Admittedly, the *Prinz Eugen* was still operational, and the Germans had a few other large ships, including the *Bismarck's* sister ship, the battleship *Tirpitz*. But thanks to persistent attacks on naval bases – in particular bombing raids by RAF planes and torpedo attacks by British submarines – German vessels spent a lot of time in dock undergoing repairs.

German naval leaders were aware of the situation and chose to focus their efforts on a large U-boat fleet. Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Germans notched up a series of successful submarine expeditions, and as the production of U-boats took off, vessels were gathered into so-called 'wolf packs', which attacked Allied shipping across the Atlantic.



German submarines were hastily prepared at naval bases to take on new challenges.

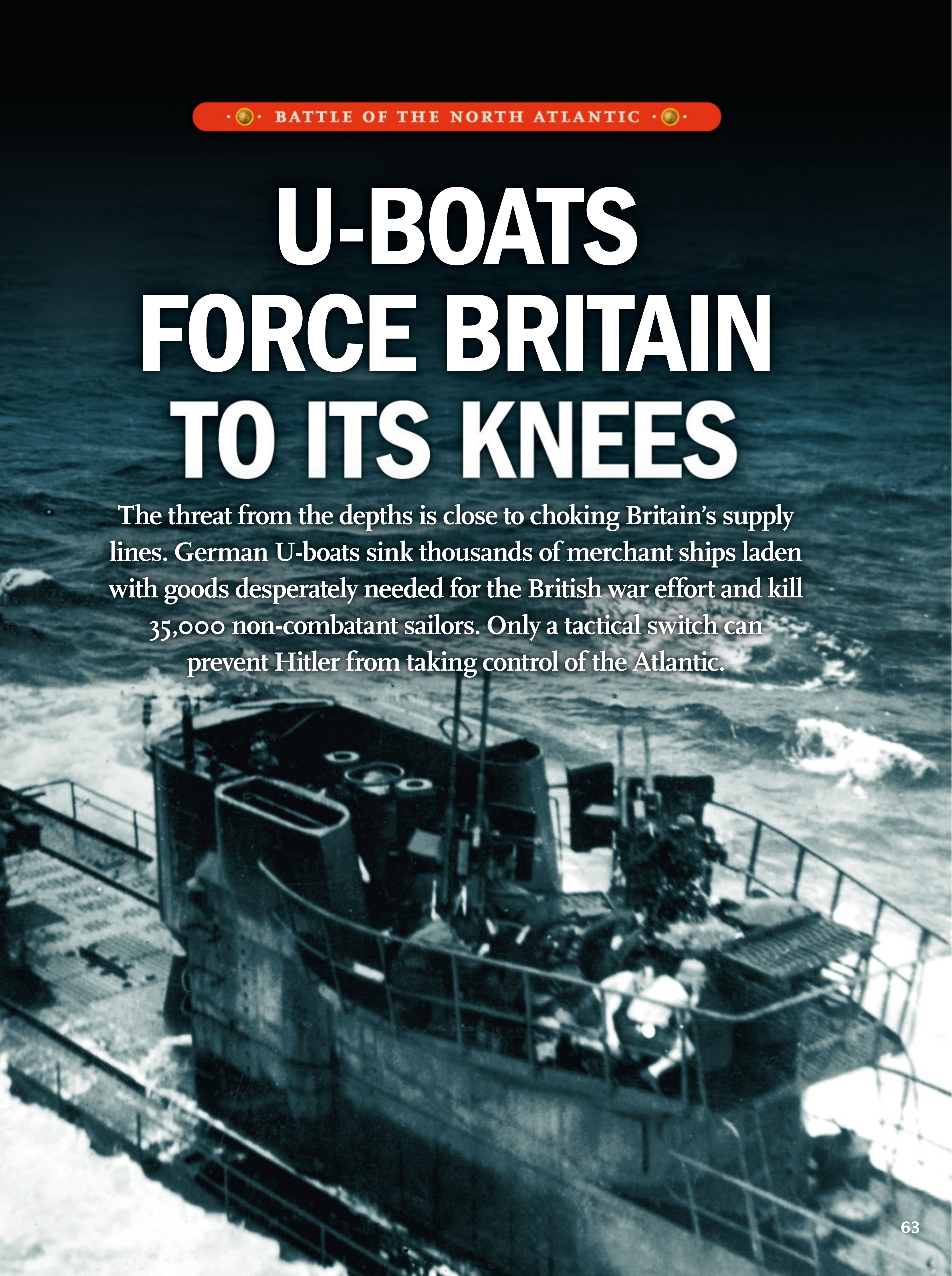
The submarines operated mostly on the surface and usually dived only during attacks.

1941

13TH NOVEMBER

U-BOATS FORCE BRITAIN TO ITS KNEES

The threat from the depths is close to choking Britain's supply lines. German U-boats sink thousands of merchant ships laden with goods desperately needed for the British war effort and kill 35,000 non-combatant sailors. Only a tactical switch can prevent Hitler from taking control of the Atlantic.



North Atlantic 1941

THE STAGE IS SET

NORTH ATLANTIC

After the Battle of Britain, Hitler abandons the idea of invading Britain. Instead, the small island nation must be starved into submission. If the Nazis can prevent vital US and Canadian convoys from reaching British shores, Churchill will be forced to capitulate. It's time for the Führer to send his U-boats into the Atlantic.

On the afternoon of 13th November 1941 the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* had carried her cargo to Malta and was now on her way back to Gibraltar. As she travelled through hostile territory, there was a high risk of attack from German aircraft and U-boats, but the *Ark Royal* had already withstood several attacks.

At 15.40, the sonar operator on the British destroyer the *Legion* heard an unusual sound. He assumed it was the propellers of one of the six other surrounding destroyers. But a minute later, a blast was heard from *Ark Royal's* starboard side. The explosion caused the ship to list violently to one side. The power went out, oil spewed, and smoke threatened to choke the crew. Captain Loben Maund moved urgently from the deck to the bridge to discover that a torpedo had hit the aircraft carrier between its fuel tank and ammunition store. The captain knew that it was time to abandon ship and requested the destroyer *Legion* to come alongside to take the *Ark Royal's* 1,500 crew on board. At the same time, the other escort ships went on the hunt for the U-boat.

On board the *U-81*, the sound of the blast had roused the crew. Anyone who wasn't on duty ran down to the sub's bow. The heavier it was, the faster it went down.

The men could hear a terrifying sound: "ping… ping… ping". British sonar was reflecting off the submarine's hull. Immediately afterwards, a battleship's propeller could be heard overhead. The *U-81* sailed in a zigzag, alternately rising and diving to escape the sonar and the 130 depth charges that rained down on it. The strategy worked and *U-81* was able to sneak away to continue its pursuit of British merchant ships and warships. In total, the U-boat would send 26 Allied vessels to the seabed in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Ocean before an American depth charge finally hit finished its career in April 1944.

The success of the *U-81* and many other German submarines came as no surprise to Admiral Karl Dönitz, commander of the German U-boat fleet. Even before the

1891-1980

NAME **KARL DÖNITZ**

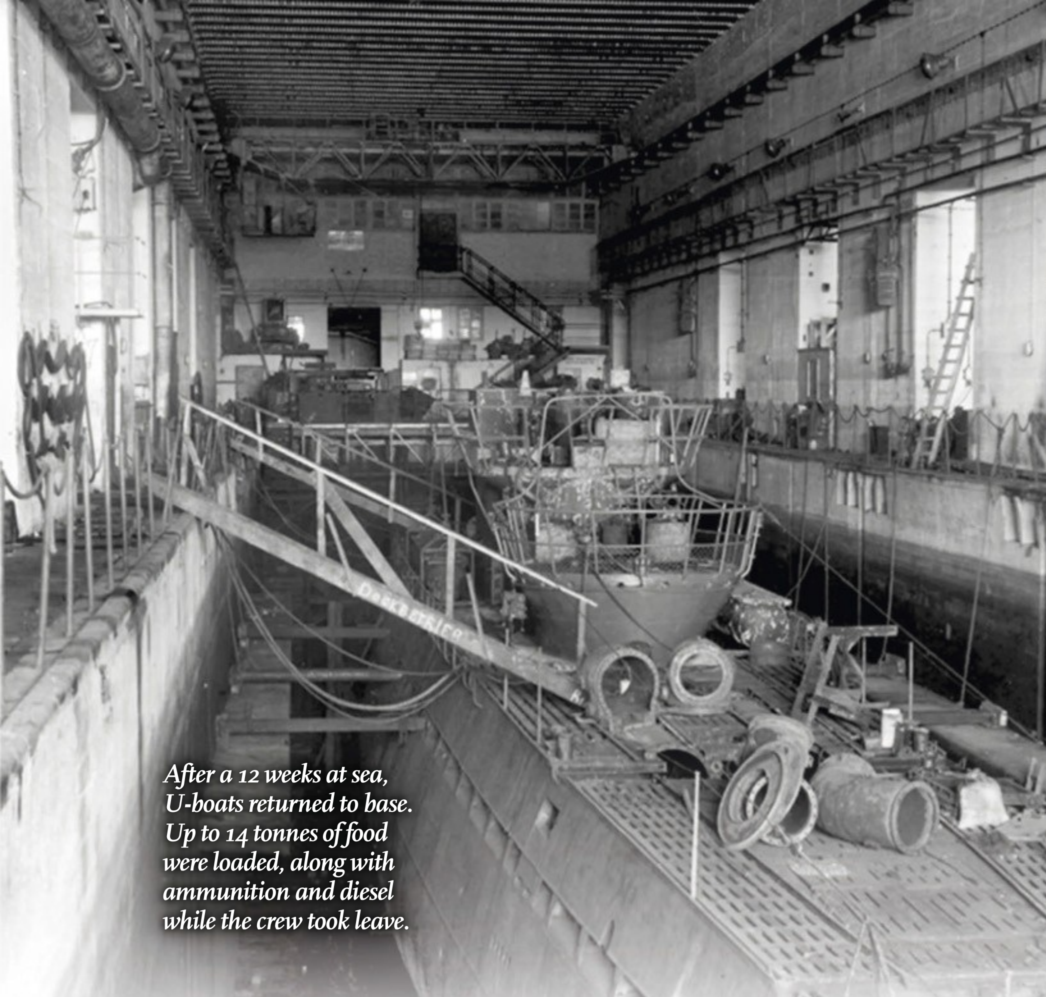
TITLE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE GERMAN NAVY

Admiral won the respect of his men

Karl Dönitz, who commanded the German submarine fleet, made a habit of enquiring into his men's private lives and sending telegrams to all fathers in the U-boat service when their wives gave birth – even if the men were at sea and far from Germany at the time. His concern made him popular among his men, who called him the Lion. Dönitz acknowledged them in turn by calling them grey wolves after their grey boats and leather uniforms.

Dönitz started on the *Breslau* in 1913. Three years later, he was promoted to first lieutenant and switched to the U-boat service. Throughout the years, he climbed the ranks, and by 1939 had the rank Commander of the Submarines. In 1943, Dönitz assumed command of the entire Kriegsmarine. In his political testament, Hitler appointed the admiral as his successor, and he led Germany in its last days. At the Nuremberg Trials, Dönitz was sentenced to 10 years in prison – a sentence he never accepted. He died in 1980.

- **Served aboard U-boats during World War I.**
- **Commanded the German U-boat fleet from 1935.**



After a 12 weeks at sea, U-boats returned to base. Up to 14 tonnes of food were loaded, along with ammunition and diesel while the crew took leave.

The U-boat base in Brest, France was reinforced with five-metre thick concrete that repeated Allied shelling failed to penetrate.

outbreak of war, he'd predicted that submarines would play a crucial role. Britain was dependent on food, military equipment and fuel from the United States to resist a German invasion. Once Britain had been isolated, the race would be on to starve the British into submission by sinking more supplies than they could replace.

Admiral begged Hitler for submarines

Dönitz believed the German fleet needed to sink merchant ships with a total weight of about 700,000 gross tonnes a month – equivalent to two million cubic metres of freight – to force the British to submit. The admiral estimated that 300 subs would be needed to fulfil that task. But Hitler, who was prone to seasickness, was initially lukewarm about giving submarines such a prominent role. "On land I am a hero. At sea I am a coward," he said.

This gold-plated medal was one of the German Kriegsmarine's honours.

But despite his misgivings, the Battle of the Atlantic began in 1939. First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill began a blockade of Germany on 26th September. Hitler retaliated with his U-boat fleet.

For Hitler the battle had been joined too soon – only 57 of his subs were combat-ready, far fewer than Dönitz wanted. The majority were also smaller vessels that could only reach targets in the North Sea before needing to return home. Consequently, Dönitz asked Hitler for permission to modernise the fleet with the new type VII submarine, which had an operating range of more than 10,000 kilometres, allowing it to operate in the Atlantic for longer periods.

Hitler had begun to rethink his opinion about naval warfare since 14th October, 1939 when the German sub *U-47* sank the British battleship HMS *Royal Oak*, which was anchored in the Scapa Flow base in Scotland. The sinking was not of major strategic importance, but it was a propaganda victory that gained the U-boats' respect among Germans while instilling a feeling of fear into the British.

At the same time, the Germans lost several large surface ships during the early part of the war, not least the *Bismarck* in 1941. The subs' proven efficiency, along with the fact that they were cheaper and faster to produce than surface vessels, enabled Dönitz to convince Hitler to invest more in U-boats.

The decision was popular in military circles, and soon more young German men were requesting to serve in the U-boat fleet than any other military force. Not least because service on submarines was considered the most honourable. Training was long and the prestige high, but there was little glamour to life at sea: during their tours, the men could look forward to 12 weeks in a crowded windowless cabin with 50 smelly and stressed men. At its widest point, the vessel measured five metres, but most of the space was occupied by engines, batteries, torpedoes, ammunition and supplies.

Everything was always wet

Being on board a submarine was not for landlubbers; most of the time, the vessels sailed on the surface, where the waves buffeted the sailors back and forth. Four men kept a lookout for air attacks from the command tower, and when the door to the tower was open during the North Atlantic's frequent storms, sea water entered the cabin. Even though the water was pumped away, everything was constantly wet.

The long voyages also meant that the greatest threat to morale and unity was not the enemy's warships, but

GERMAN U-BOATS

Two models served distinct roles

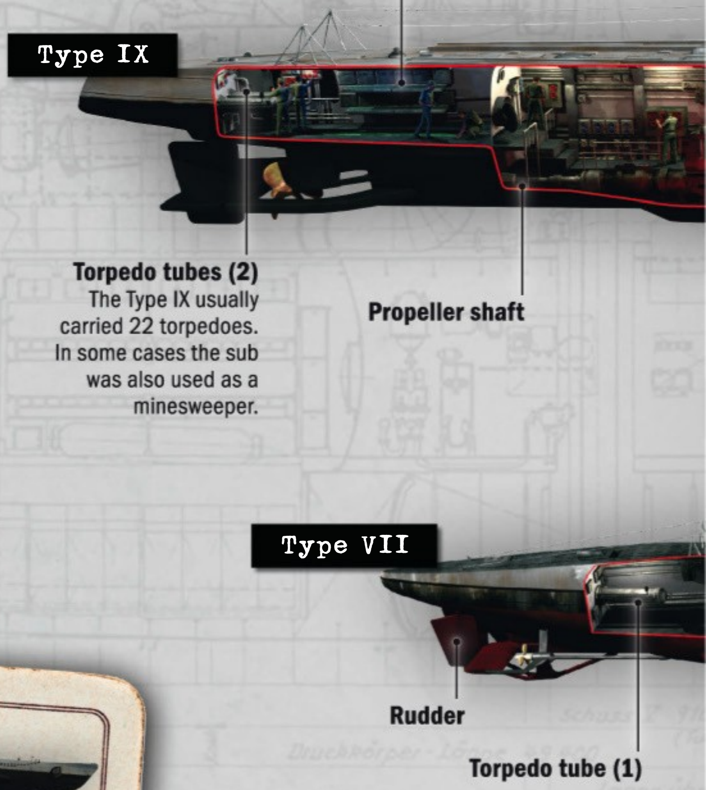
German engineers couldn't build a single U-boat that was both big enough to sail long distances and yet small enough to dive quickly. The solution was to make two.

Shipyards received their first orders to produce submarines in March 1935, two months before Hitler officially broke the 1919 Treaty of Versailles.

Engineers had a difficult task. First, they had to construct a vessel that could dive quickly to carry both crew and equipment to safety. Originally, fleet command also requested a long-range boat. But while small boats could dive quickly, only large boats could carry enough fuel, supplies and ammo for long voyages.

It was impossible to reconcile the differences and build a single sub with all these features. The solution was to create two models.

Needless to say, the crew's desire for reasonable space and comfort had no influence on either design.



Torpedo tubes (2) The Type IX usually carried 22 torpedoes. In some cases the sub was also used as a minesweeper.

IX (model IXC)

Range, surface	11,000 nautical miles
Range, submerged	63 nautical miles
Length	76.8 metres
Draft	4.7 metres
Weight	1,232 tonnes
Speed, surface	18.3 knots
Speed, submerged	7.3 knots
Electric engines	2 x 500 hp
Diesel engines	2 x 2,200 hp
Crew	55

BIG BROTHER HAD A LONG RANGE

With a range of 11,000 miles (20,400 km), the big brother of the German submarine fleet could operate across the Atlantic and even to the Indian Ocean. The IX model was valued for its spaciousness but its slow dive rate made serving on it dangerous. 194 were launched.

VII (model VIIC)

Range, surface	6,500 nautical miles
Range, submerged	80 nautical miles
Length	67.1 metres
Draft	4.8 metres
Weight	865 tonnes
Speed, surface	17 knots
Speed, submerged	7.6 knots
Electric engines	2 x 375 hp
Diesel engines	2 x 1,400 hp
Crew	48

LITTLE BROTHER DIVED QUICKLY

The smaller type VII dived swiftly and could usually escape Allied warships. On the other hand, the tight spaces were a nightmare for the men. The VII model was the backbone of the German submarine fleet with over 700 vessels deployed during the war.

Ships were safest in square convoys

Traditional convoys that travelled in long lines were quickly abandoned. Instead, the Allies sailed in a square formation so the accompanying warships could protect the cargo ships more easily. At the same time, the ships with the most valuable cargo sailed in the middle, where there was less risk of a torpedo hitting them.

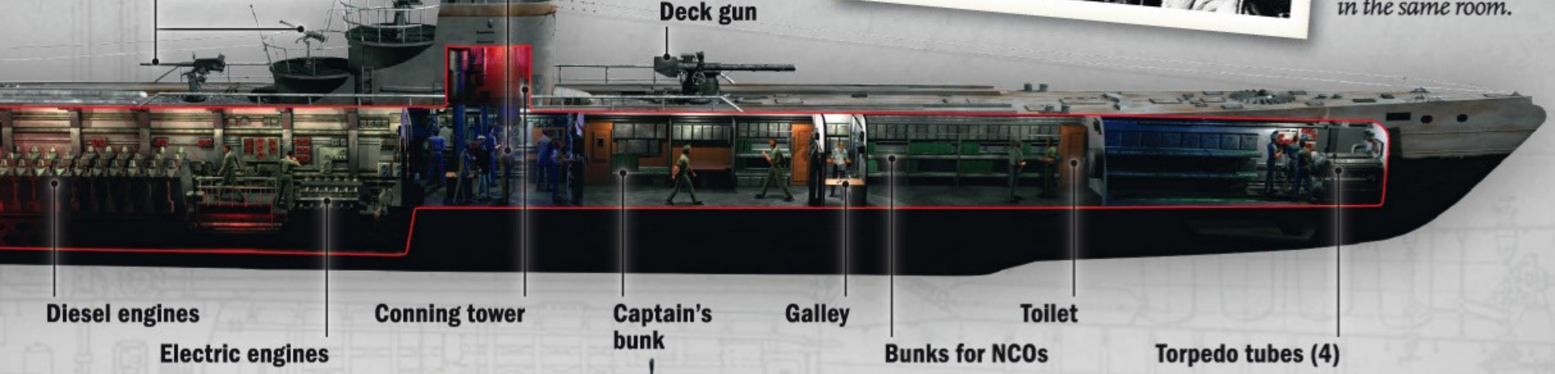
German U-boat
Allied freighter
Allied escort

boredom. Time passed slowly while the captain searched the ocean for prey. Even reading was often impossible because the batteries needed saving. These were needed to operate the electric motor when the diesel engines were shut down during diving. Fights sometimes broke out among frustrated crew members in the lulls.

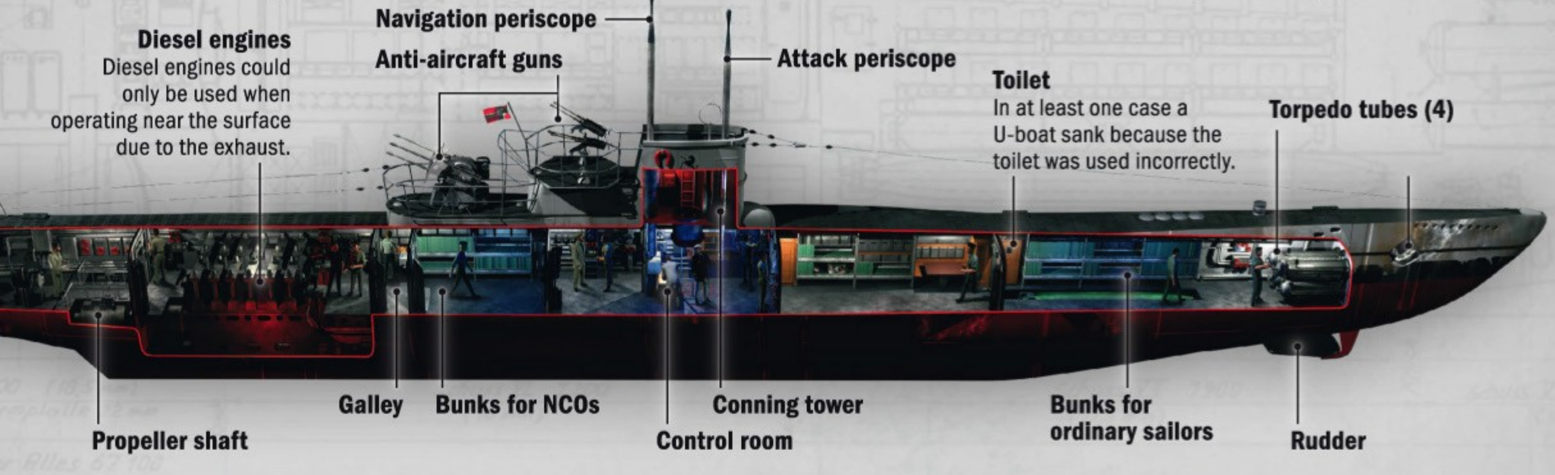
In the first year of the war, German submarines had to sail around the north of Scotland to reach the convoys in the Atlantic. But after the fall of Norway and France in June 1940, U-boat bases were moved to the Norwegian and French Atlantic coasts. Precious sailing time was saved, and the Germans seemed to have a real chance of isolating the British and winning the Battle of the Atlantic.

Before the war, Britain imported 59 million tonnes of food and raw materials per year plus all the oil it needed. Thanks to U-boat attacks, that number had fallen to just 12 million

The space on board was so cramped that the crew had to take turns sleeping. The U-boat's torpedoes were also stored in the same room.

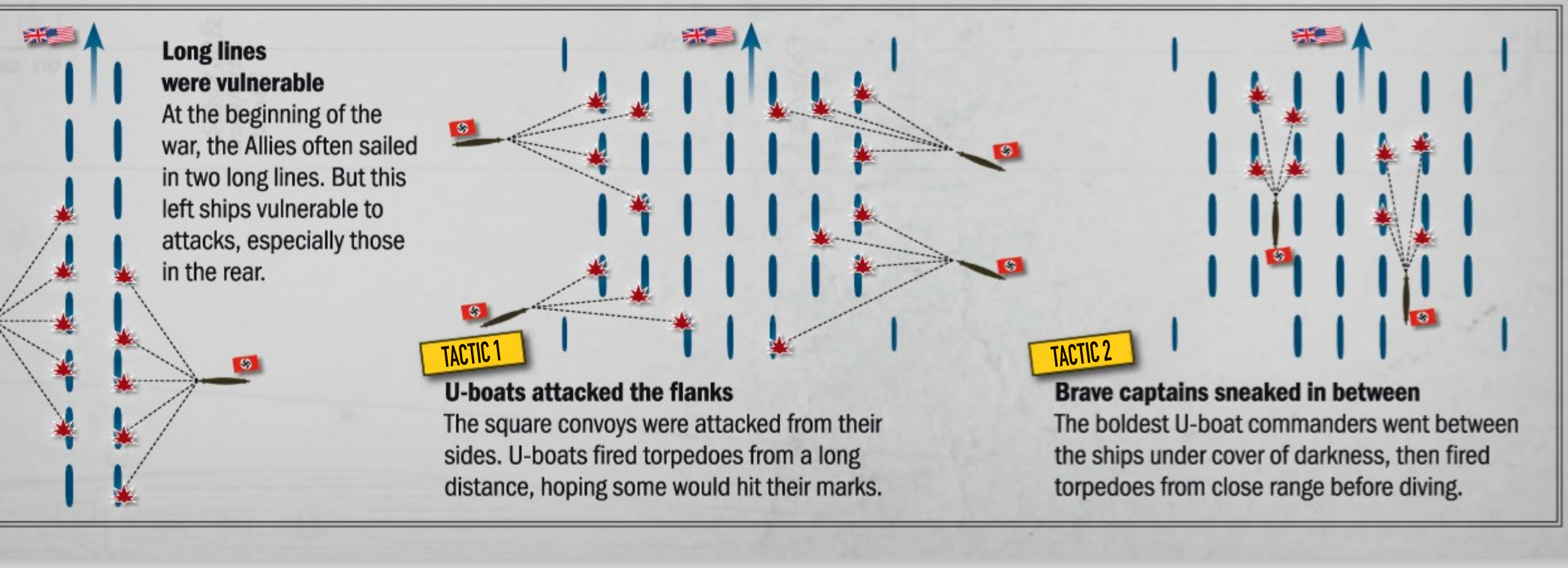

Attack periscope
Navigation periscope
Anti-aircraft gun
Radar
Deck gun
Diesel engines
Electric engines
Conning tower
Captain's bunk
Galley
Toilet
Bunks for NCOs
Torpedo tubes (4)

Control room
Early models had a third periscope in the control room, which disappeared in Type IXC.


Navigation periscope
Anti-aircraft guns
Attack periscope
Torpedo tubes (4)
Galley
Bunks for NCOs
Conning tower
Control room
Propeller shaft
Bunks for ordinary sailors
Rudder

Diesel engines
Diesel engines could only be used when operating near the surface due to the exhaust.

Toilet
In at least one case a U-boat sank because the toilet was used incorrectly.


TACTIC 1
TACTIC 2

Long lines were vulnerable
At the beginning of the war, the Allies often sailed in two long lines. But this left ships vulnerable to attacks, especially those in the rear.

U-boats attacked the flanks
The square convoys were attacked from their sides. U-boats fired torpedoes from a long distance, hoping some would hit their marks.

Brave captains sneaked in between
The boldest U-boat commanders went between the ships under cover of darkness, then fired torpedoes from close range before diving.

tonnes by the end of 1940. The British also felt under siege, and there was a fear that the war would be lost on the home front where people were living on starvation rations: "Nobody really understood how close we were to actually losing the war due to lack of food," a business economist revealed later.

WOLF PACKS ATTACKED IN THE DARK

By 1941, submarine attacks had become an effective offensive tactic for the Germans, who carried charts of the Atlantic divided into 10 x 10-kilometre quadrants. Each quadrant was labelled with two letters and four digits, so that radio operators could send coded messages revealing where they had sniffed out prey, after which the U-boats met in so-called wolf packs.

The submarines positioned themselves in a line across the convoy's route, ready to attack the following night. Up to 30 submarines would surface simultaneously to launch a coordinated attack. Germans used battery-powered, silent torpedoes that typically hit the side of the target ship. But it was best if the torpedo exploded just below its hull. The explosion forced the water away leaving a vacuum, so that the hull expanded. When the water returned, the keel would break. The Germans often encountered problems with failing igniters and defective balance chambers early in the war. Later, engineers developed torpedoes to home in on the noise from a ship's propellers; otherwise, they continued through the water without exploding until they hit something.

A brave captain was able to navigate between the lines of convoy ships at night and torpedo key targets, which were usually located in the middle of the formation. After an attack, captains sometimes hid beneath a merchant ship, where their U-boat was almost impossible to detect. Once the panic was over, they could steal quietly away.

Hitler threatened Allies with torpedoes

These audacious raids were well on the way to forcing Britain to its knees. Prime Minister Winston Churchill later wrote that, "The only thing that ever really frightened me during the war was the U-boat peril." From June to October 1940, the grey wolves sank hundreds of Allied ships, and the submarine crews referred to the period as *Die Glückliche Zeit* (Happy Times). Hitler had become a complete convert to U-boat warfare by this point, stating that, "Whoever believes that he can help England should know one thing in any event: any ship, with or without escort, that comes in front of our torpedo tubes will be torpedoed!"

Eight out of 10 died at sea

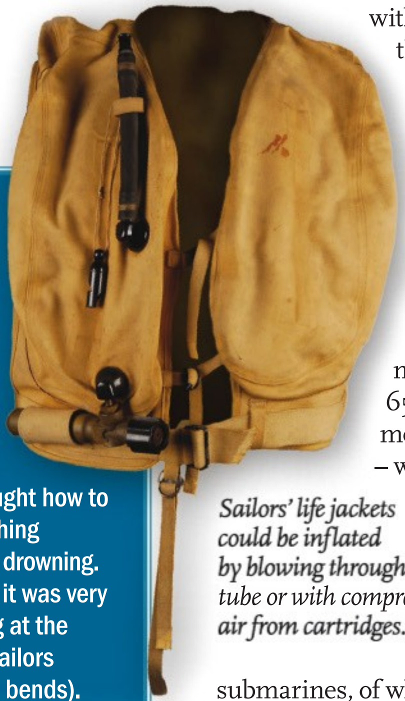
The crew of a wrecked submarine was doomed. When the boat sank, it almost always became a coffin.

All sailors aboard German U-boats were taught how to use a 'tauchretter', a life jacket with breathing apparatus that could, in theory, save them from drowning. But in practice, the vest was useless, because it was very difficult to get out of a U-boat once it was lying at the bottom of the sea. And if they did manage it, sailors would die due to decompression sickness (the bends).

Some sailors escaped the doomed submarines before they sank. Yet losses in the U-boat fleet were huge – around 80 percent of German sailors aboard submarines died in service.

The sailors on the U-175, which sunk on 17th April 1943, were statistically lucky: only 13 out of 41 died.

The Germans repeated the threat when the country declared war on the US in December 1941. Now Dönitz could – with great pleasure – initiate his attack on the Americans with Operation Paukenschlag (drum beat). With the help of their dairy cows – supply submarines that could resupply U-boats with food and fuel – the wolf packs could reach the US East Coast. Here, American vessels sailed alone without the protection of convoys. This, and the lack of blackout orders, made their ships easy prey for the U-boats.



Sailors' life jackets could be inflated by blowing through a tube or with compressed air from cartridges.

At the same time, the Germans broke Allied codes in the summer of 1942. Thanks to the intercepted information, U-boat command knew many of the convoys' routes, as well as which ones were most vulnerable due to a lack of escort ships.

During an average month in 1942, merchant ships with a total weight of 650,000 gross tonnage – equivalent to more than 1.8 million cubic metres of goods – were sunk. The number was very close to Dönitz's target of how much was required to cripple Britain. And thanks to efficient U-boat production, by the beginning of 1943, the fleet could boast no fewer than 400 operational submarines, of which around half were in the front line.

Still, it wasn't enough. The missions were many, the Atlantic was huge, and the Allies had begun to get wise to German tactics. At the same time, a number of new technological inventions and tactical ideas began to make an impact in the way the naval battle was fought.

Depth charges could shred a sub's hull

The Allies thought it safest to cross the Atlantic in convoys, which typically consisted of 20-60 merchant ships. Each convoy was formed into a square, to occupy minimum space. This made them harder to spot, yet also easier for the escort ships to defend them. U-boats lay low in the water, and a convoy could be missed from the command tower from as little as 30 kilometres away. On the other hand, the Germans had radio equipment that could intercept communications between the British ships. And as the vessels drew closer, the Germans could hear the noise from their propellers and engines using a specialised underwater microphone known as a hydrophone.

However, the British also had some new tricks up their sleeves. Early in the war, the escort ships searched for subs using the ASDIC sonar system. This relied on an acoustic

Crew members kept a lookout for merchant ships through the periscope while sailing near the surface. The U-boat only dived once a ship was discovered and they were ready to attack. Often other submarines were summoned, so the U-boats could hunt as a pack.

technique where sound waves emitted from a dome beneath the ship would bounce back if they hit any underwater objects. The echo allowed the system to calculate the distance, direction and depth of the object. But ASDIC could not detect ships on the surface. During 1941-42, however, ships were also equipped with radar that could reveal surface objects via microwave emissions.

Once the escort ships had located a sub, depth charges were dropped. The Allies were handicapped, however, because depth charges could only be rolled off the rear deck. German U-boat captains simply had to manoeuvre out of their way.

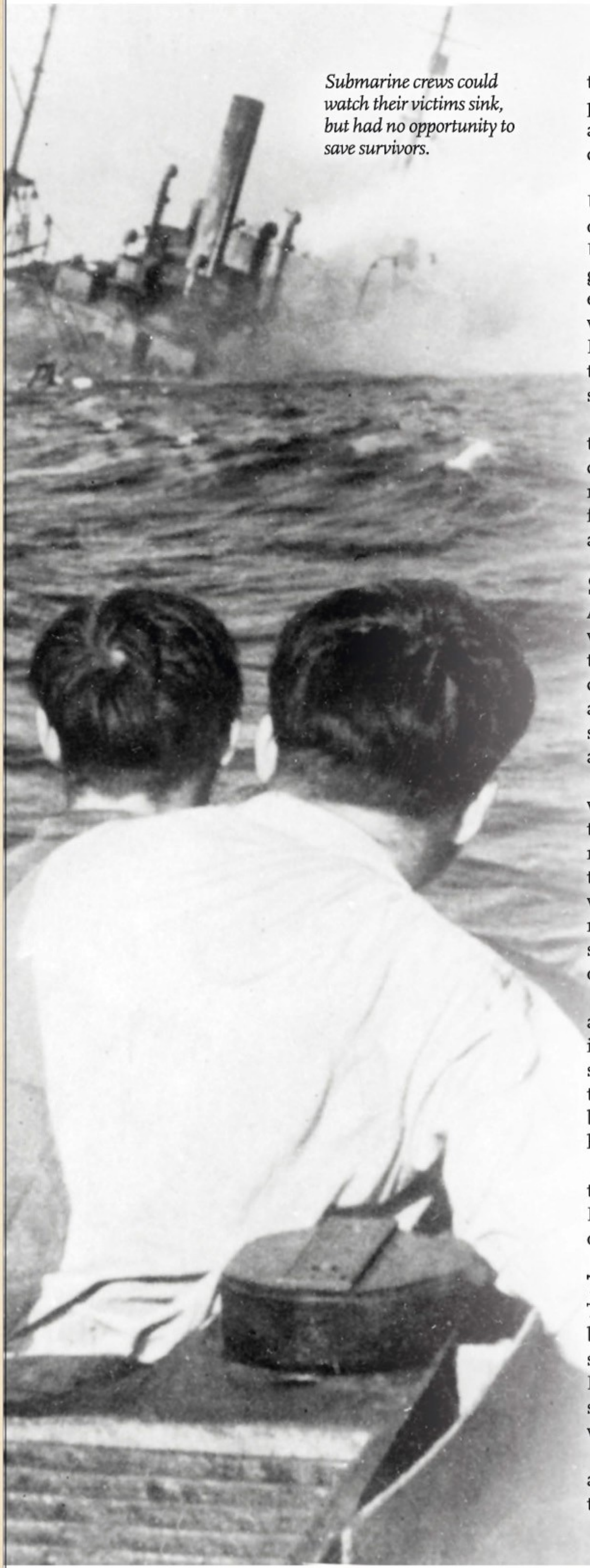
Normally, a depth charge had to detonate at four to six metres from a U-boat to breach its hull. Detonations from 7-15 metres would damage a sub, while explosions at a greater distance primarily had a psychological effect.

As a rule, it wasn't a single well-placed depth charge that would sink a sub, but an intense bombardment involving many charges. Escort ships also tried to drop depth charges in a diamond shape around a submarine to maximise the chance of damage. The weapon's main disadvantage was that the charges were primed to explode at a specific depth. Plus, if the attack failed, the blasts created so much disturbance in the water that it was difficult to restore sonar contact.

Captain's cap – an elite group consisting of just three percent of German U-boats sank 30 percent of all Allied ships.

But from the end of 1942, the British installed a newly developed mortar – the Hedgehog – on their escort ships. These mortars fired 24 depth charges from the ship's bow, which only detonated if they hit something. And if one charge was triggered, then the rest exploded, which increased the weapon's effectiveness. Thanks to the Hedgehog, it became harder for subs to escape undamaged after an attack.

At the same time, the threat from the air grew. At the start of the war, subs could settle in the middle of



Submarine crews could watch their victims sink, but had no opportunity to save survivors.

the Atlantic, out of reach of enemy planes. But as the war progressed, long-range aircraft with bases in North America and the British Isles were capable of providing air cover for the convoys along most of their route.

At first, even with radar, pilots found it tricky to locate the U-boats before they could dive, thanks to the great expanse of ocean. The Germans had introduced a snorkel system, so that U-boats could remain immersed and avoid detection. But gradually, the Allies developed advanced radar systems, enabling pilots to spot a small snorkel poking up out of the water. At the same time, the planes were equipped with the Leigh Light (L/L), which automatically aligned with the radar to bathe a submarine in light in the middle of the night. The submarines had gone from hunters to prey.

By the end of the war, the wolf packs were also suffering at the hands of aircraft carriers, which provided permanent air cover, supplemented by merchant ships fitted with launch ramps for fighters. The subs weren't armoured, so bombs from an Allied plane could prove fatal. In total, about half of all U-boats sunk received the killer blow from aircraft.

SUBMARINES WERE CHASED FOR HOURS

As Allied superiority grew, the convoys were also reinforced with groups of escort vessels that patrolled the waters around the convoy, so the merchant vessels and their close support could escape if attacked. As the groups weren't associated with any particular convoy, they could continue chasing a submarine for hours if necessary while the convoy continued across the Atlantic.

Ultimately, however, the deciding factor was production: who could build the most vessels in the shortest time. When the United States entered the war at the end of 1941, the mighty American production facilities became a factor that the Germans could not match in the long term. The record was set when an American shipyard managed to build a merchant ship on assembly lines in four days. In addition, ship engines became more powerful, so the ships could outrun the U-boats.

At the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, the Allies' accelerated production helped turn the Battle of the Atlantic in their favour in just a few months. In May 1943, the Allies sank 41 submarines. The period was dubbed "Black May" by the Germans. Dönitz realised that the North Atlantic had now become too dangerous for his submarines, and on 24th May, he ordered them away from the North Atlantic convoy route.

Instead, the admiral gradually deployed many of his vessels to remote hunting fields in the Caribbean, India and the Far East, where they docked at Japanese bases. But the submarines only enjoyed limited success in those distant waters.

TERROR TACTICS HADN'T WORKED

The French U-boat bases were also exposed to heavy bombings from the air, and eventually the German submarines were displaced to bases in the Baltic and Norway. But here too, they were chased by the RAF. Many subs were sunk in the straits between Denmark, Sweden and Norway while attempting to head out into the Atlantic.

The belief among those in the submarine fleet that this was a tactic worth pursuing dropped dramatically. But it wasn't the case with Hitler. In 1945, he sent new super type XXI and

XXIII U-boats into the war. But the battle had long been lost. There were no longer sufficient numbers of submarines for the previously successful tactic of hunting in packs to be used. Now the subs were lone wolves who scoured the sea and attacked singly, putting them at greater risk of being spotted and bombed by the Allies.

Some grey wolves still slipped into the Atlantic and hunted all the way to the US East Coast. It was here that one of the last U-boats was sunk by the US coastguard. It happened after Grand Admiral Dönitz had called off the fight on 4th May 1945 with the words:

"Six years of U-boat war lie behind us. You have fought like lions. A crushing material superiority has forced us into a narrow area. A continuation of our fight from the remaining basis is no longer possible... Lay down your arms after a heroic battle without equal. We remember in deep respect our fallen comrades, who have sealed with their death their loyalty to the Führer and Fatherland... Long live Germany!"

The lone sub off the US coast never received the radio signal, and the whole crew drowned. The sailors were the last to die in the war.

A total of 28,000 German sailors died during the Battle of the Atlantic. Allied losses were also severe. Over 5,000 vessels ended at the bottom of the ocean, most of which were sunk by U-boats. The total tonnage destroyed by the Germans was over 14 million, and around 35,000 sailors on Allied vessels lost their lives.

7 x 50-mm Carl Zeiss binoculars were standard issue on German subs.

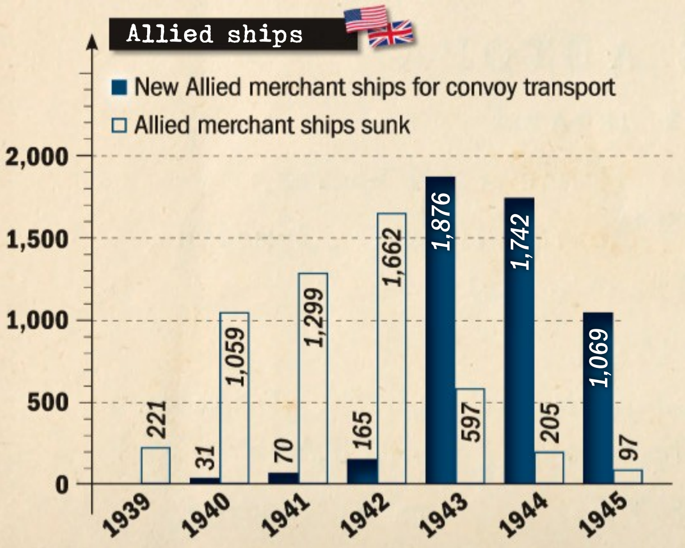
PERSPECTIVE

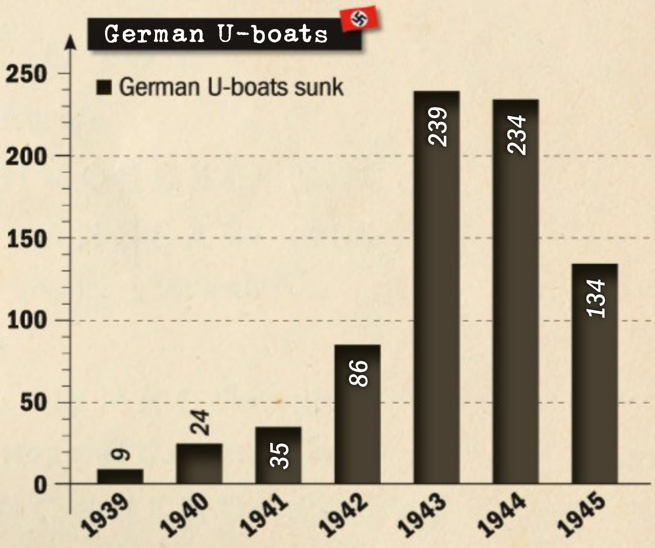
U-boats could not keep pace

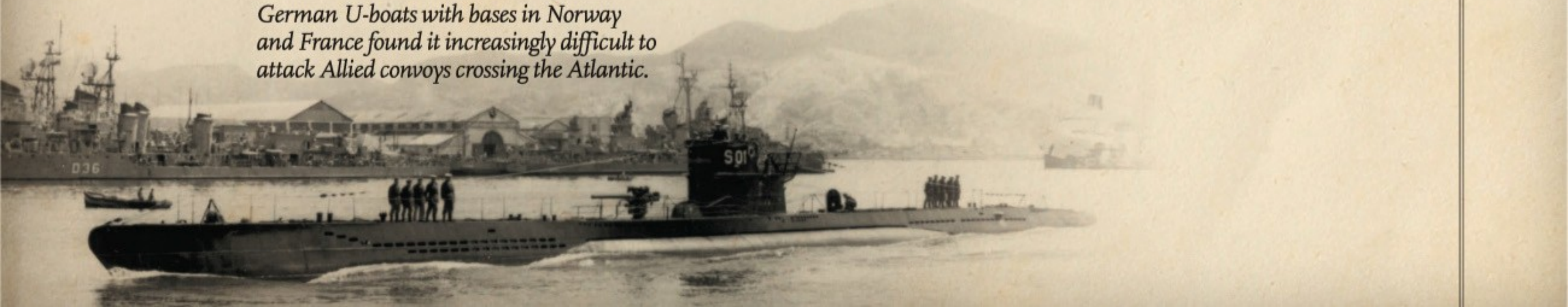
Once the US put its industry on a war footing, it produced so many new merchant vessels that the German subs simply could not sink enough vessels to make a difference.

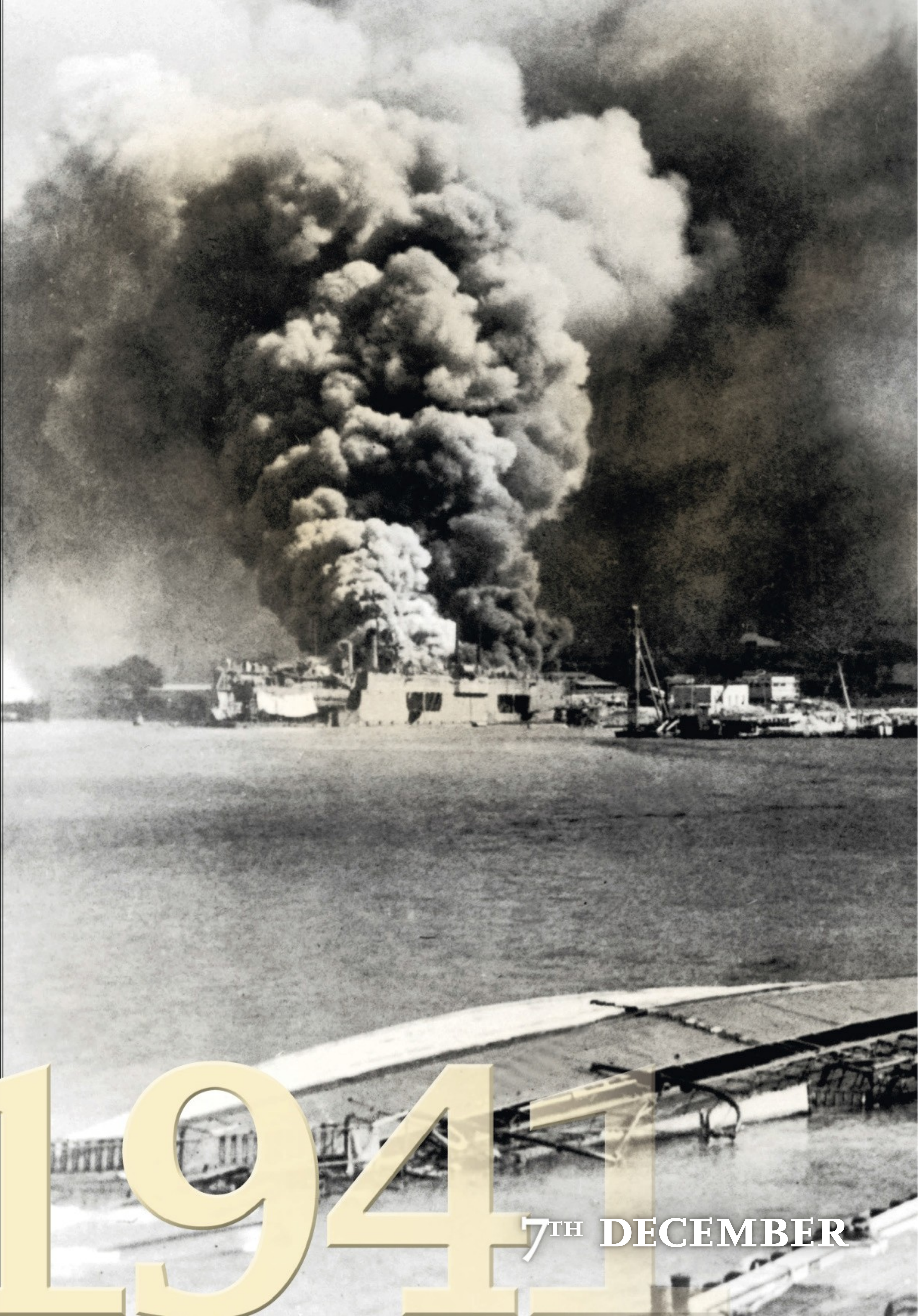
In the first year of the war, the British only managed to put a few German submarines out of action. But in the spring of 1943, development of new technologies and defensive techniques, including depth charges, had advanced so far that the Allies sank 41 subs in May alone. The massive losses continued throughout the war. At the same time, US production of new merchant ships peaked in 1943, by which point they were making more than the Germans' subs could sink. Thus, the Allies could send convoys to Russia and especially Britain packed with supplies and troops.

Soldiers from the US and Canada, together with the evacuated forces from Dunkirk, provided the nucleus of the army that landed in Normandy in June 1944 to begin the liberation of Europe.






German U-boats with bases in Norway and France found it increasingly difficult to attack Allied convoys crossing the Atlantic.

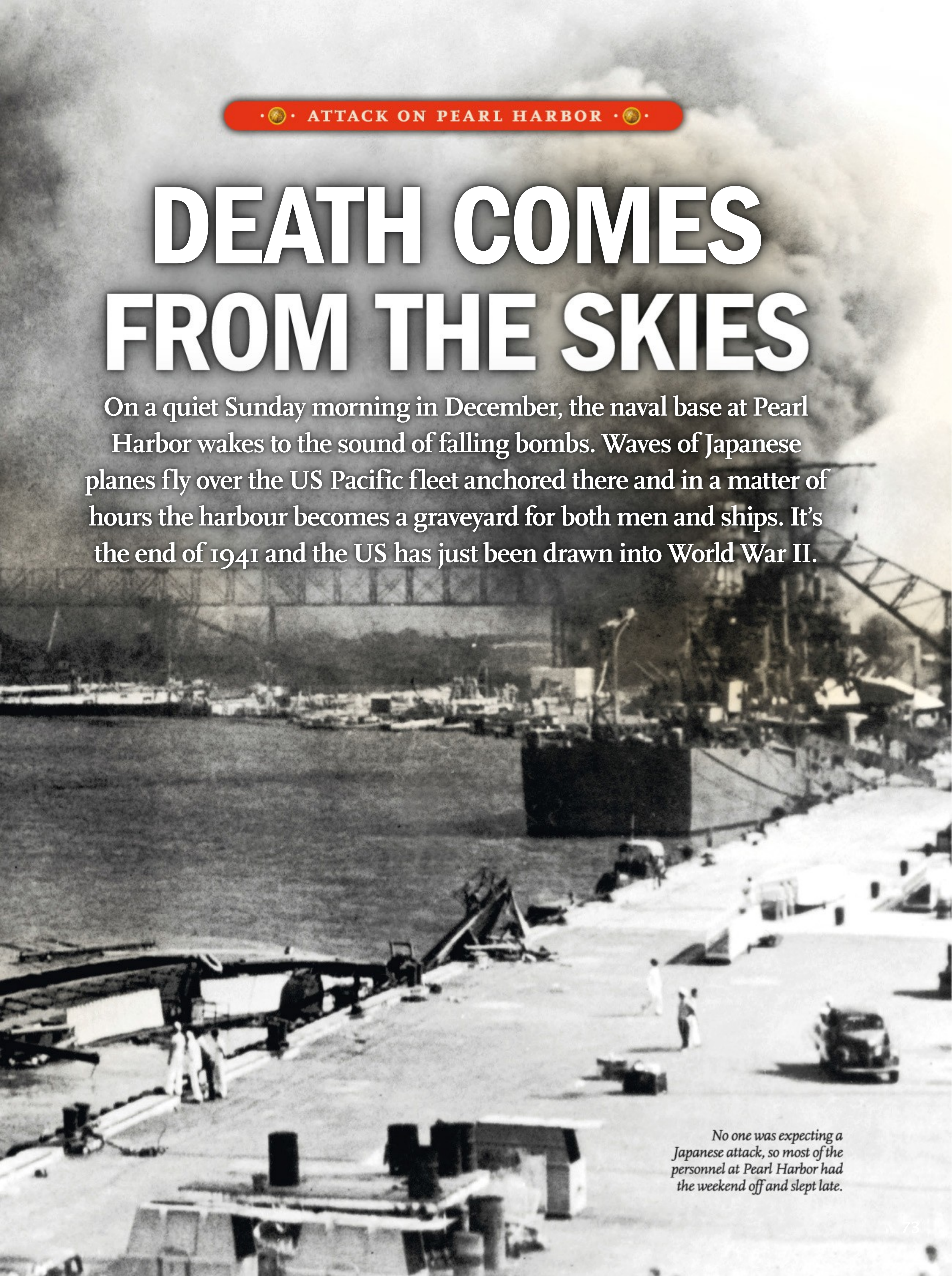


1941

7TH DECEMBER

DEATH COMES FROM THE SKIES

On a quiet Sunday morning in December, the naval base at Pearl Harbor wakes to the sound of falling bombs. Waves of Japanese planes fly over the US Pacific fleet anchored there and in a matter of hours the harbour becomes a graveyard for both men and ships. It's the end of 1941 and the US has just been drawn into World War II.



No one was expecting a Japanese attack, so most of the personnel at Pearl Harbor had the weekend off and slept late.

Hawaii 1941

THE STAGE IS SET

Hawaii
Pearl Harbor

WWII rages in Europe, while on the other side of the world Japan expands its territory. The US maintains its policy of neutrality, but introduces economic sanctions to slow the Japanese advance. The Japanese, believing that a confrontation with the US is unavoidable, decide to strike a decisive first blow at Pearl Harbor.

CLOUDS LAY LIKE A THICK BLANKET OVER THE PACIFIC as 183 Japanese planes approached the Hawaiian Islands on 7th December 1941. Beneath him, Commander Mitsuo Fuchida caught a glimpse of the ocean. Moments later, when his pilots broke through the clouds in their Nakajima B5N 'Kate' bombers, they could see white surf below them. It was the north coast of Oahu island.

Before long Fuchida could see Pearl Harbor. Through his binoculars, the commander assessed the sleepy naval base, counting the American battleships. All eight were in port – and not a single enemy plane was on the wing.

At 07.49 Fuchida told his radio operator, Norinobu Mizuki, to send the agreed coded signal to the other planes. The phrase "To! To! To!" crackled through the radio – an abbreviation of *totsugeki*, the Japanese word for attack!

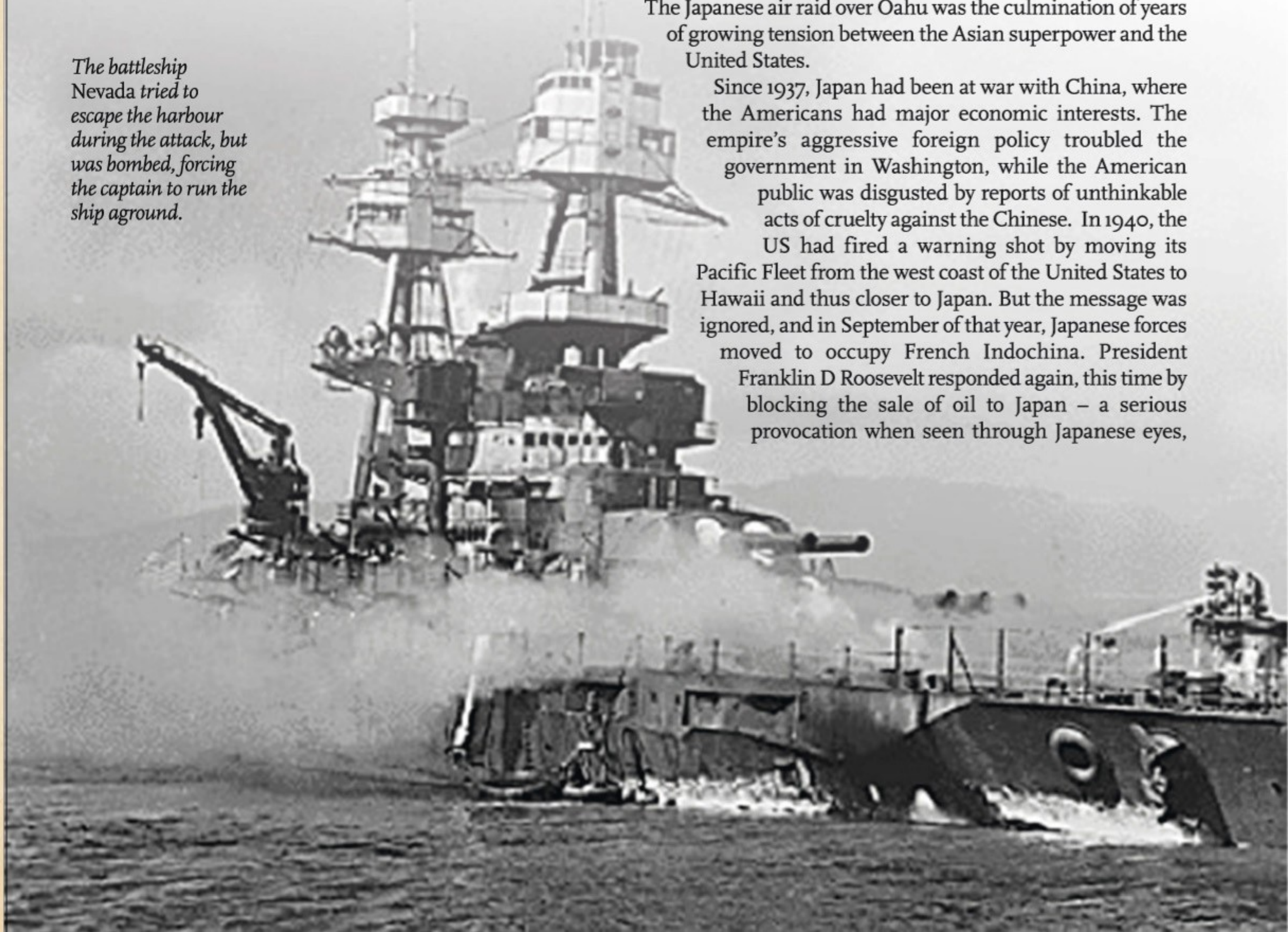
The first target was the Wheeler Field airfield, 15 kilometres north-west of Pearl Harbor. From above, Aichi D3A 'Val' dive bombers swooped in and dropped their payloads, while low-flying Mitsubishi A6M 'Zero' fighters opened fire with machine guns setting buildings, hangars and lines of US aircraft ablaze. Wheeler Field's commander Colonel William J Flood later described how the Japanese fighters flew so low he "could even see the gold in their teeth".

For the Americans, the unthinkable was happening: the Pacific Fleet was under attack in its home base, and the United States was being forced into World War II.

Roosevelt had shut off Japan's oil supply

The Japanese air raid over Oahu was the culmination of years of growing tension between the Asian superpower and the United States.

Since 1937, Japan had been at war with China, where the Americans had major economic interests. The empire's aggressive foreign policy troubled the government in Washington, while the American public was disgusted by reports of unthinkable acts of cruelty against the Chinese. In 1940, the US had fired a warning shot by moving its Pacific Fleet from the west coast of the United States to Hawaii and thus closer to Japan. But the message was ignored, and in September of that year, Japanese forces moved to occupy French Indochina. President Franklin D Roosevelt responded again, this time by blocking the sale of oil to Japan – a serious provocation when seen through Japanese eyes,



The battleship Nevada tried to escape the harbour during the attack, but was bombed, forcing the captain to run the ship aground.

1884-1943

NAME **ISOROKU YAMAMOTO**

TITLE ADMIRAL AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE JAPANESE FLEET

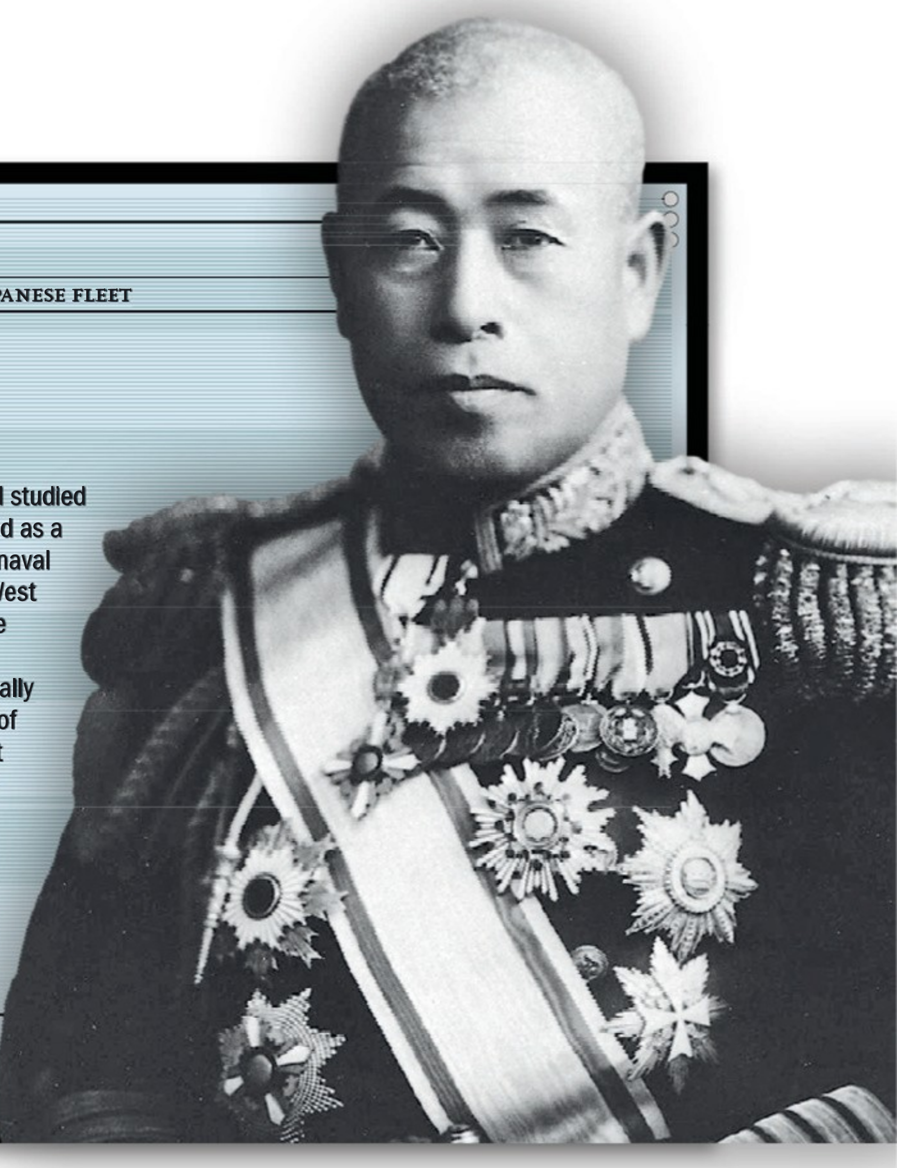
Japan's naval chief feared US strength

Yamamoto knew the West well. The Japanese admiral had studied at Harvard University in the United States, been appointed as a naval attaché to Washington and had attended several naval conferences in London. Yamamoto's knowledge of the West made him reluctant to go to war with the US because he feared its superior production capabilities.

However, once war became inevitable, the admiral loyally began forming plans. He believed that the best chance of success lay in a pre-emptive and devastating strike that would break the US Pacific fleet. As a keen advocate of aircraft carriers, the Japanese commander preferred to carry out the attack by plane.

Yamamoto had an almost sacred status among the Japanese public. When the Americans managed to shoot down his plane in 1943, the authorities waited a month before publishing the news.

- **Studied at Harvard University in 1919-21.**
- **Commander of the Japanese fleet from 1939.**



because the country's poor mineral resources left it deeply dependent on US oil.

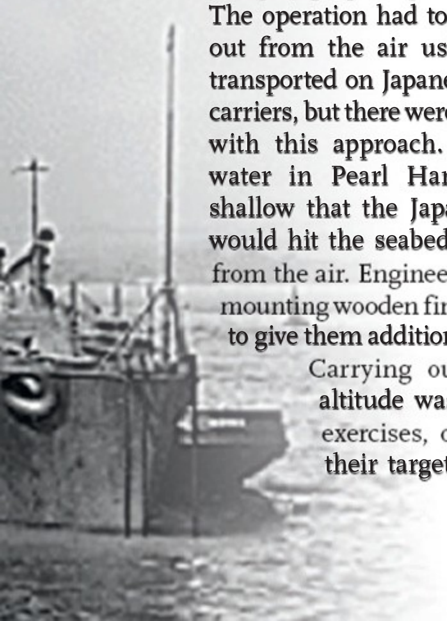
In January 1941, almost a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, predicted the outbreak of war, writing that, "A conflict with the United States ... is inevitable." Yamamoto believed that the Japanese needed to "destroy the US main fleet at the outset of the war" in order to have any chance of success.

Yamamoto had already conceived the bold plan of action that would be used against the Hawaiian naval base and the Japanese spent 1941 thoroughly preparing for the attack.

The operation had to be carried out from the air using planes transported on Japanese aircraft carriers, but there were problems with this approach. First, the water in Pearl Harbor was so shallow that the Japanese torpedoes would hit the seabed when dropped from the air. Engineers solved this by mounting wooden fins on the torpedo to give them additional buoyancy.

Senninbari *(one-thousand stitch belts) were sewn by women to bring luck.*

Carrying out bomb attacks from high altitude was another challenge. In early exercises, only 10 percent of bombs hit their targets, but intensive training and better crew cooperation bore fruit: the proportion of accurate hits gradually rose to around 80 percent.



Meanwhile, a spy attached to the Japanese consulate in Honolulu tracked the Pacific Fleet's movements, the number of ships at the base and their daily routine. What he could not observe himself, he read in the newspaper, which reported all ship activities. The spy also discovered that activity levels at the base were at their lowest on Sunday mornings.

ATTACK FORCE CREPT INTO POSITION

In the autumn of 1941, as Japanese attack preparations entered their decisive phase, Japanese and US diplomats were still trying to find a peaceful solution.

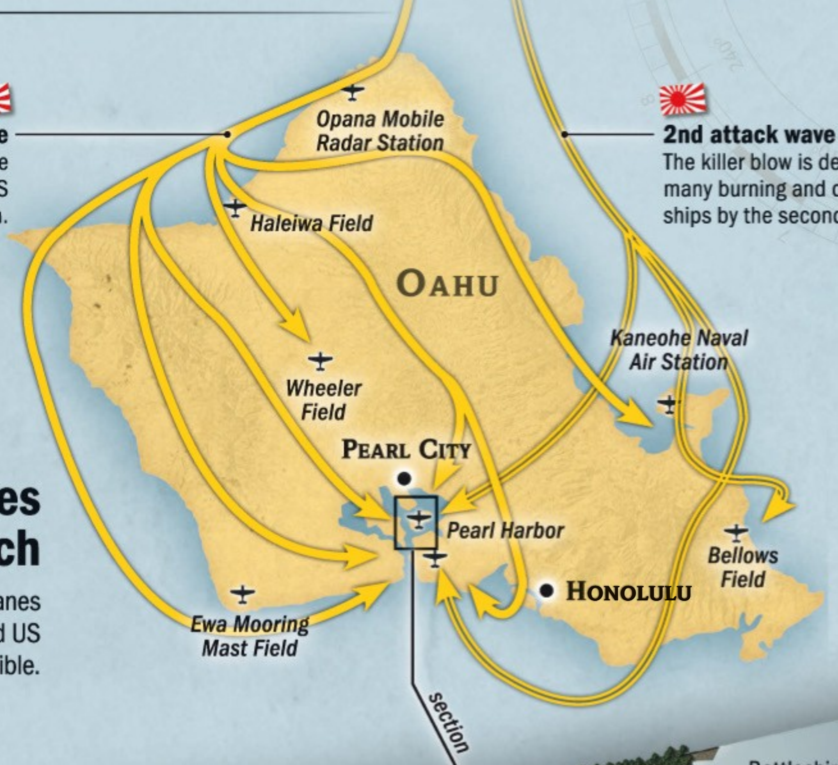
The Japanese demanded that the US cease its support of China and resume oil supplies, while the Americans demanded Japan leave China and French Indochina.

"It's an ultimatum", protested Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo – and he refused to give in to US demands.

Gradually, it became clear that the time for negotiations was over, and at the end of November 1941 Japanese ships began slipping away from their naval ports in small groups to gather in the far north. From there, the assault fleet's six aircraft carriers and their escort would set out across the icy winter sea. The route was intended to minimise the risk of

The Japanese struck without warning

Admiral Yamamoto deliberately chose to attack Pearl Harbor on a Sunday morning, knowing that was the time the Americans would be least prepared. Most of them were still in bed when the Japanese pilots roared across the base.

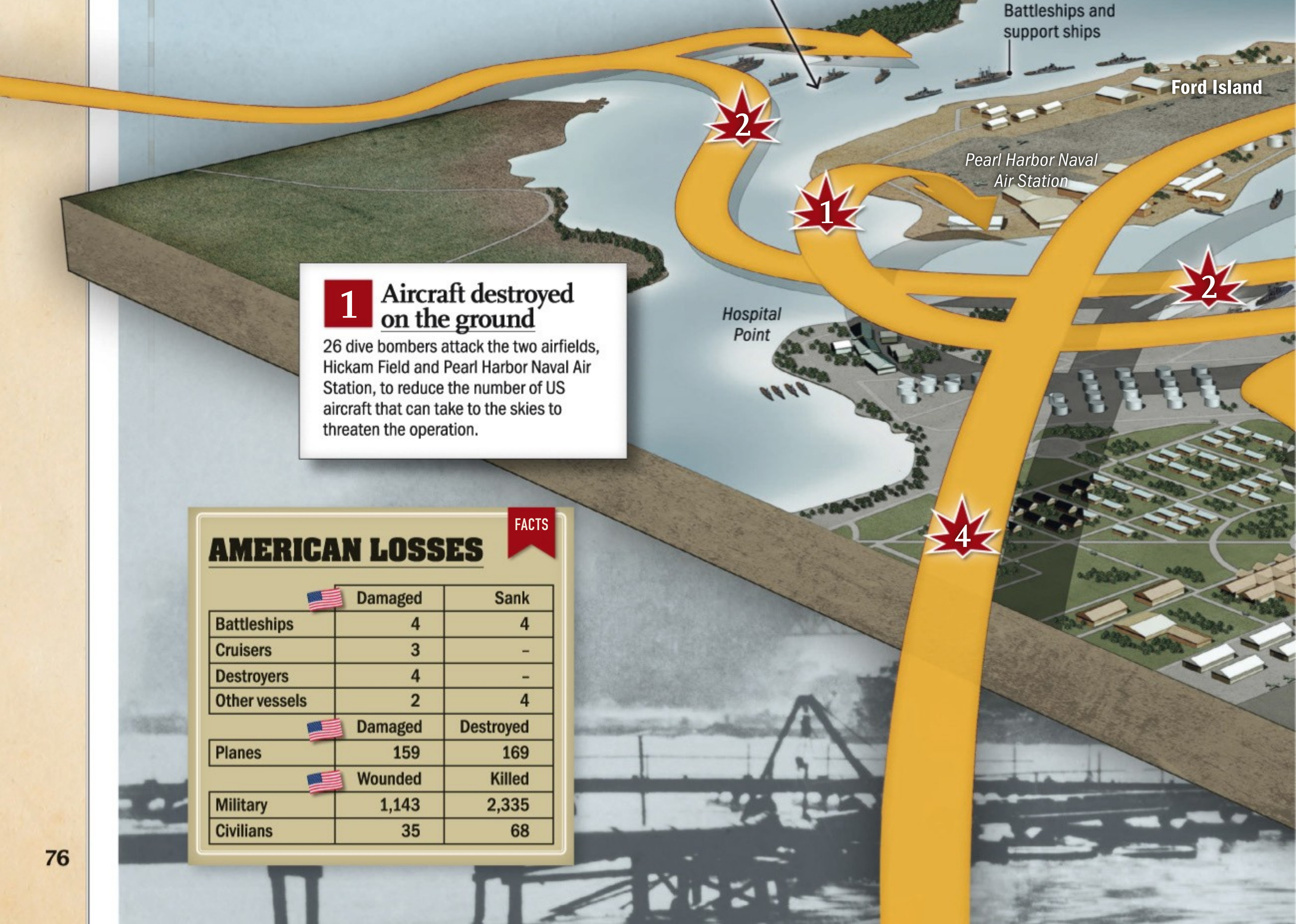

Opana Mobile Radar Station
Haleiwa Field
OAHU
Wheeler Field
PEARL CITY
Kaneohe Naval Air Station
Pearl Harbor
Bellows Field
HONOLULU
Ewa Mooring Mast Field
section

1st attack wave
On the way to Pearl Harbor, the Japanese aircraft put US airfields out of action.

2nd attack wave
The killer blow is delivered to many burning and damaged ships by the second wave.

Japan's planes hid on approach

The aircraft carrier-based planes flew low over the water to avoid US radar for as long as possible.


Battleships and support ships
Ford Island
Pearl Harbor Naval Air Station
Hospital Point
2
1
2
4

1 Aircraft destroyed on the ground

26 dive bombers attack the two airfields, Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor Naval Air Station, to reduce the number of US aircraft that can take to the skies to threaten the operation.

AMERICAN LOSSES

FACTS

	Damaged	Sank
Battleships	4	4
Cruisers	3	–
Destroyers	4	–
Other vessels	2	4
	Damaged	Destroyed
Planes	159	169
	Wounded	Killed
Military	1,143	2,335
Civilians	35	68

1ST ATTACK WAVE 07.50-08.10

ZERO FIGHTERS	43
KATE TORPEDO BOMBERS	40
KATE BOMBERS	49
VAL DIVE BOMBERS	51

MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Sink the Pacific fleet's eight battleships.
- Eliminate Oahu's air defences, especially the 145 aircraft at the large Wheeler Field airfield.

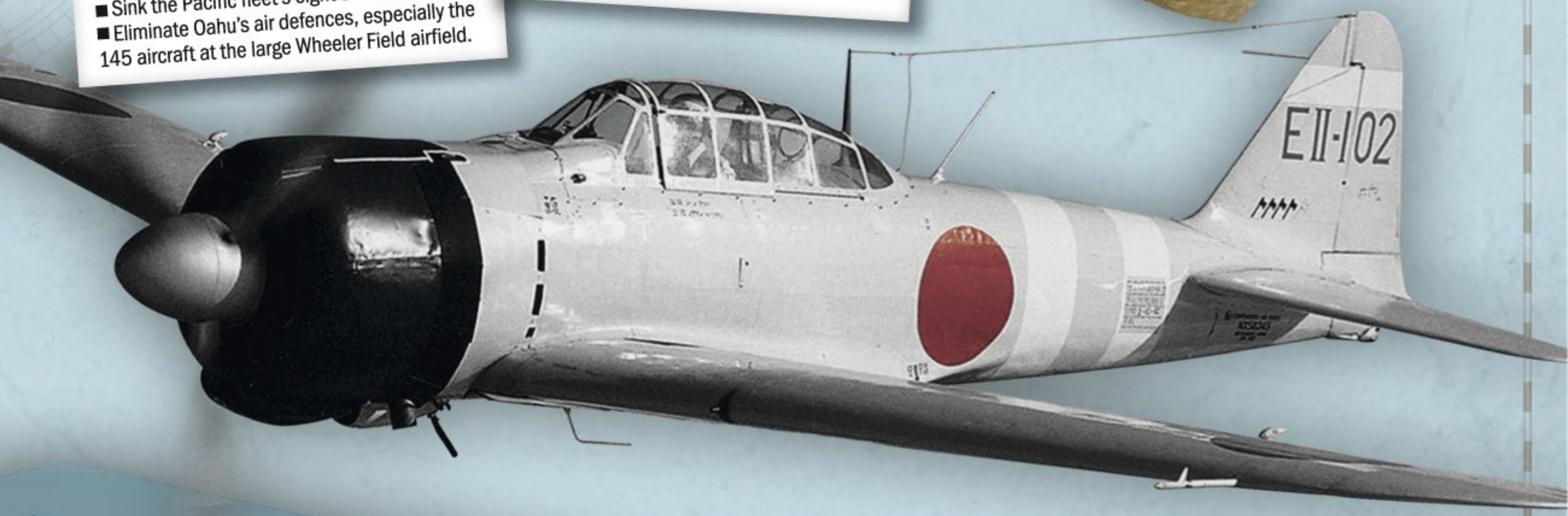
2ND ATTACK WAVE 09.05-09.45

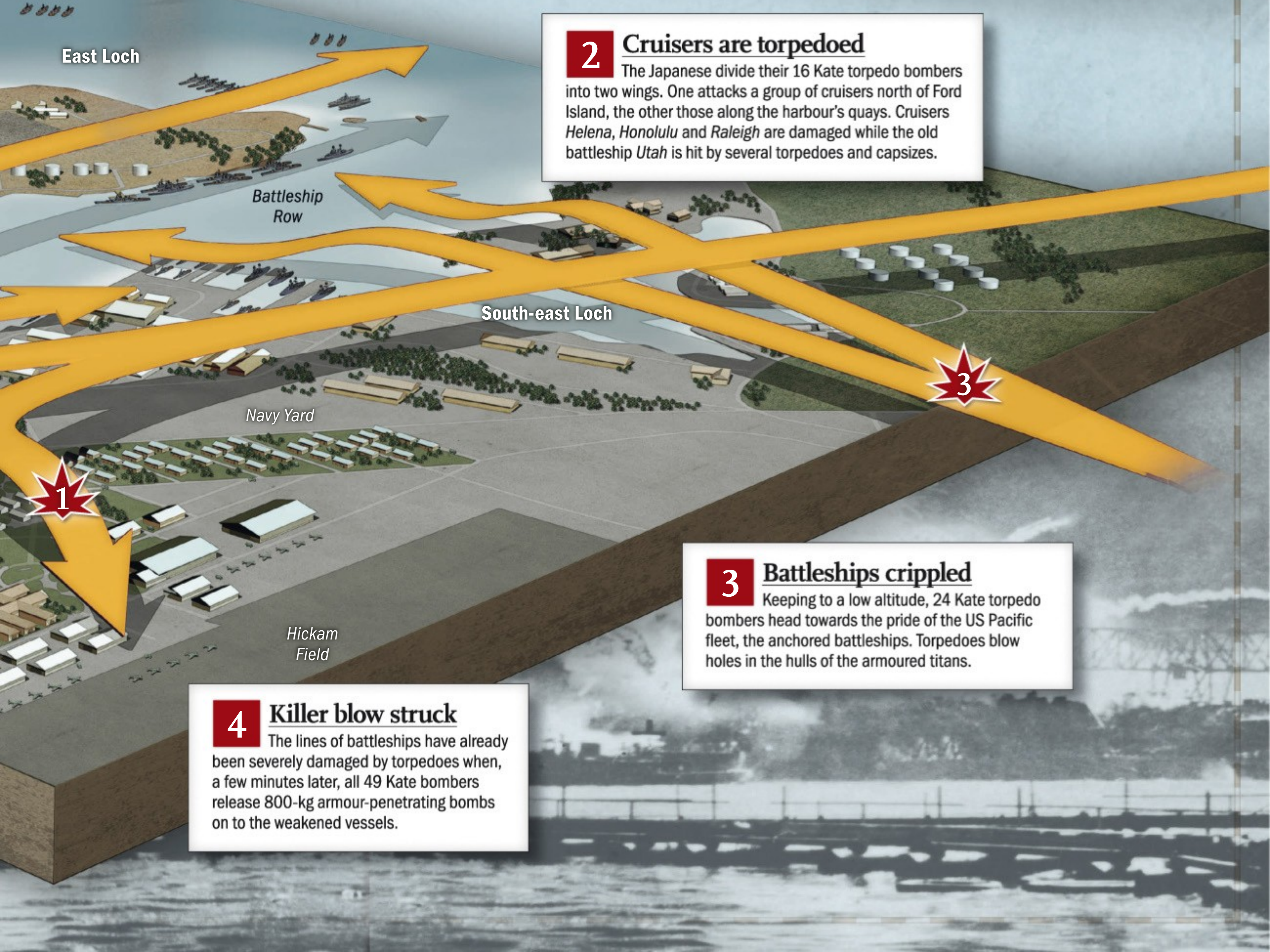
ZERO FIGHTERS	36
KATE BOMBERS	54
VAL DIVE BOMBERS	78

MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Sink the battleships and other naval vessels that survived the first wave.
- Make further attacks on US airfields and secondary targets.

Leather helmets and flight goggles were standard issue for Japanese pilots.





2 Cruisers are torpedoed

The Japanese divide their 16 Kate torpedo bombers into two wings. One attacks a group of cruisers north of Ford Island, the other those along the harbour's quays. Cruisers *Helena*, *Honolulu* and *Raleigh* are damaged while the old battleship *Utah* is hit by several torpedoes and capsizes.

3 Battleships crippled

Keeping to a low altitude, 24 Kate torpedo bombers head towards the pride of the US Pacific fleet, the anchored battleships. Torpedoes blow holes in the hulls of the armoured titans.

4 Killer blow struck

The lines of battleships have already been severely damaged by torpedoes when, a few minutes later, all 49 Kate bombers release 800-kg armour-penetrating bombs on to the weakened vessels.

encountering any ships along the way, but if any foreign vessels did discover them, the Japanese captains had orders to sink them: the Americans must not learn of their approach.

The fleet was about 1,500 kilometres east of Japan when a coded message came from Admiral Yamamoto: "*Niitakayama Nobore*" ("Climb Mount Niitaka"). This was the signal for fleet commander Admiral Nagumo to open his sealed orders.

"Our emperor has decided to go to war against the United States, Britain and Holland," Nagumo read. The attack would go ahead as planned.

US OFFICER IGNORED RADAR SIGNAL

At around 07.00 on Sunday, 7th December, a US radar station on the northern tip of Oahu picked up a strong signal from out at sea. But the news didn't travel beyond the duty officer, who assumed that the radar had registered six B-17 bombers, which he knew were coming from the US mainland. It meant that the Americans were taken completely by surprise when bombs began raining down on Wheeler Field airfield. Fuel-tank explosions created a sea of fire as long rows of closely parked US fighter planes were set alight. Within minutes, other Oahu airfields were also being hit.

Commander Fuchida was satisfied so far. As one of the most highly respected pilots in the empire, he was the ideal man to plan and lead the mission. Fuchida combined a mild and thoughtful outlook with deadly efficiency. The commander had coordinated all preparations for the air attack and was now himself in place high above the target.

At 07.53, his radio operator broadcast the message "Tora! Tora! Tora!" to the assault fleet. *Tora* is Japanese for tiger, and the signal confirmed that the attack was underway and that the attackers had achieved complete surprise.

A few minutes later, the squadron reached Pearl Harbor itself. About 90 vessels of differing sizes were in the port, but Japan's key target was the row of eight heavily armoured and highly armed battleships.

The attackers considered the battleships to be more dangerous than the US Pacific Navy's aircraft carriers, all of which were away from the harbour that morning. By taking out all the battleships at Pearl Harbor, Japanese leaders believed they'd weaken America's resolve to fight – and ensure military supremacy for at least six months.

The Americans hadn't placed any torpedo nets in the harbour or put up barrage balloons because they felt safe in their Hawaiian base. As a result, there was nothing to stop the Kate bombers from coming in low and dropping their payloads. The five-metre-long torpedoes broke the water's surface, leaving a bow wave behind them as they streaked towards the anchored battleships. Moments later, a series of explosions rocked the ships' heavy metal hulls.

BATTLESHIP WENT UP IN FLAMES

At Ford Island airfield in the middle of the harbour, Captain Logan Ramsey was in the command centre when a plane flew past at close range. At first Ramsey thought it was one of the young US pilots. "Get that guy's number," the officer shouted. Then Ramsey heard the drone of the same plane dropping its

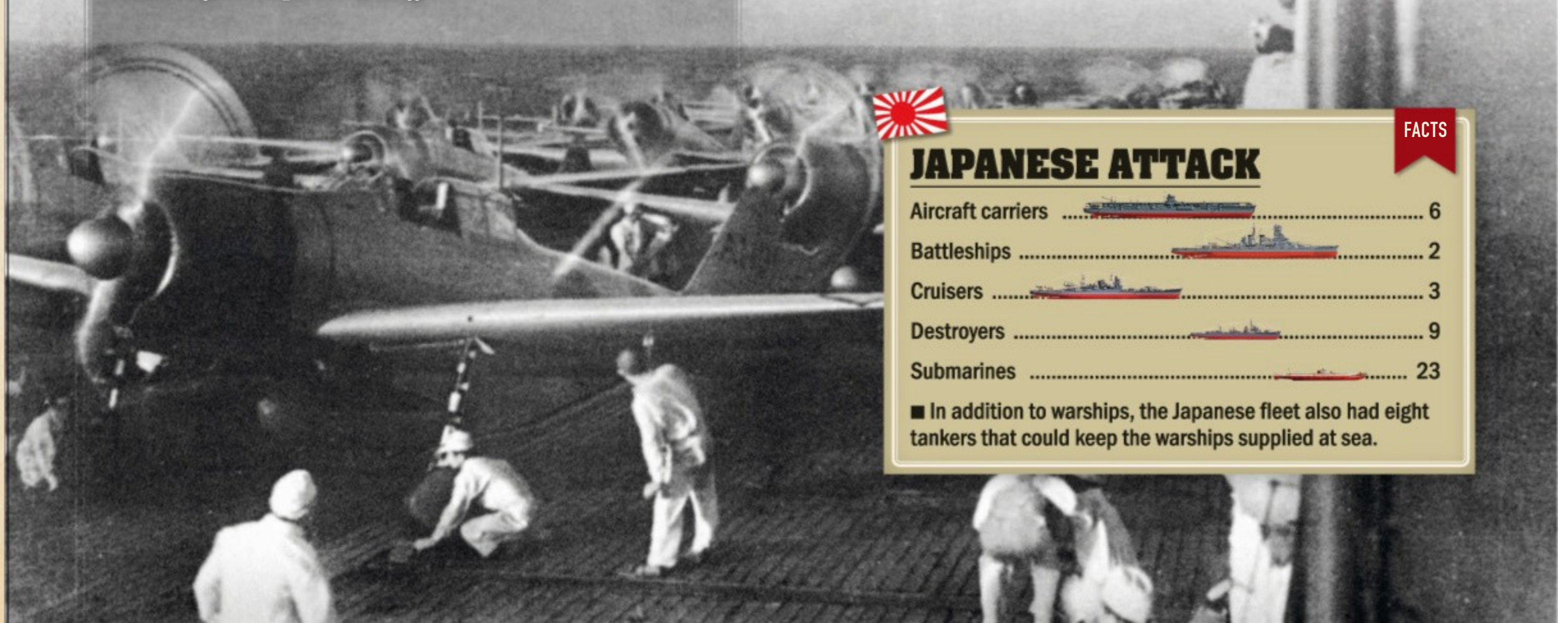
Japan put everything into the surprise attack

The Japanese assembled the most powerful aircraft-carrier fleet ever seen to ensure that the naval base at Pearl Harbor was utterly destroyed.

On 26th November 1941 a mighty fleet left Japan. At the force's heart were the six large aircraft carriers *Akagi, Kaga*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*. With a total of more than 420 aircraft, the fleet was by far the strongest aircraft-carrier armada ever assembled.

The carriers were protected by two battleships and three cruisers. A number of submarines were also included, which were sent to Pearl Harbor in advance. Mini-subs also featured in the attack. They were ordered to enter the naval base and sink any ships that escaped the torpedoes. This part of the operation failed, however.

The fleet was under the command of the experienced but cautious Chuichi Nagumo. The admiral had been ordered not to sail into US waters if the naval force was discovered or if a diplomatic solution could be found before the attack was due to take place.



The activity on board the Japanese aircraft carriers was hectic before the planes took off.

FACTS

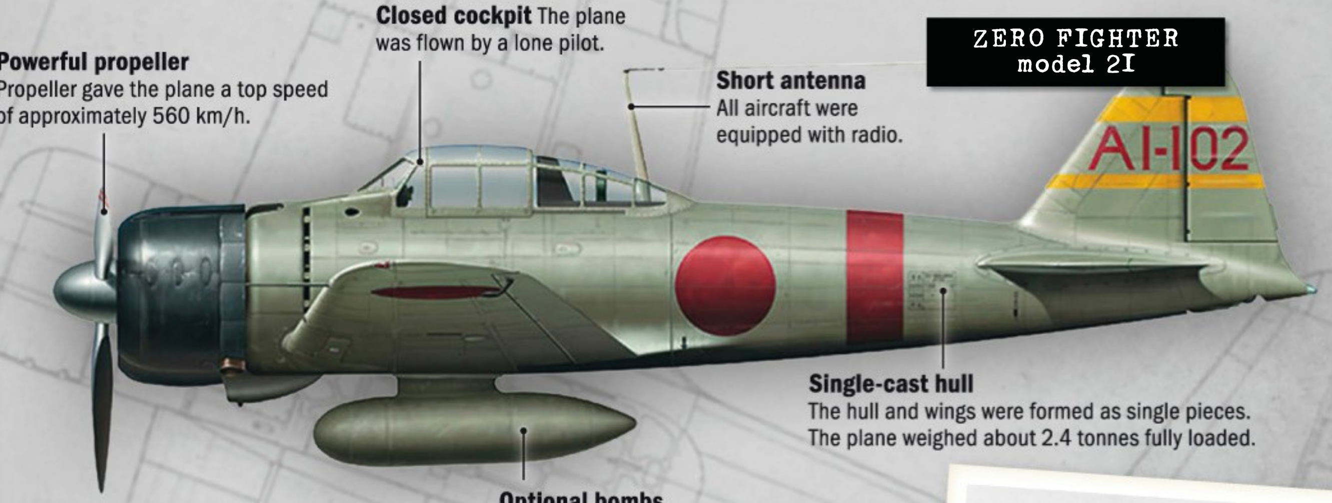
JAPANESE ATTACK

Aircraft carriers	6
Battleships	2
Cruisers	3
Destroyers	9
Submarines	23

■ In addition to warships, the Japanese fleet also had eight tankers that could keep the warships supplied at sea.

Japanese wasp ravaged the Pacific

The Japanese war industry manufactured over 10,000 A6M 'Zero' aircraft. The fighter was light and highly manoeuvrable, but its top-speed was relatively modest.



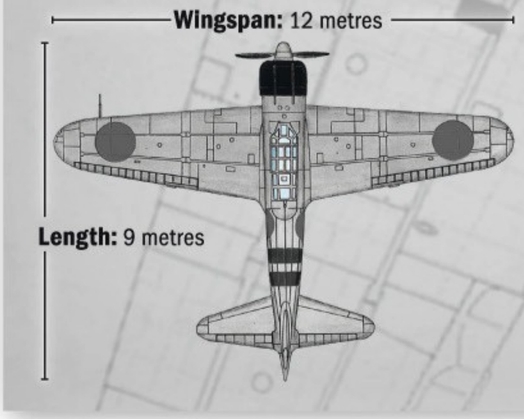
Powerful propeller Propeller gave the plane a top speed of approximately 560 km/h.

Closed cockpit The plane was flown by a lone pilot.

Short antenna All aircraft were equipped with radio.

Single-cast hull The hull and wings were formed as single pieces. The plane weighed about 2.4 tonnes fully loaded.

Optional bombs The Zero was a fighter but could be equipped with one or two bombs.



At the end of their briefing, Japanese pilots swore to do their duty before taking off from the aircraft carriers.

missile. "Never mind, it's a Jap!" he exclaimed and ran into the radio room where he sent the message: "AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NOT DRILL".

At 07.58, the message went out on all local frequencies, while Japanese aircraft swarmed around their targets. At the same time, 49 Kate bombers approached from three kilometres up, armed with 800-kg armour-piercing bombs. At around 08.00, the bombers pulled their triggers, releasing their payloads, which fell onto the weakened battleships.

From his place high in the sky, Fuchida saw the glow of light from a huge explosion. A thick column of smoke and fire shot up one kilometre into the air, and a moment later his Kate bomber was buffeted by the blast. A bomb had drilled through two armoured decks on the battleship USS *Arizona* and ignited the forward ammunition magazine, which ripped the thick sides of the ship like a tin can.

Within seconds, large parts of the *Arizona* were engulfed in flames, and the 185-metre-long ship began its short journey to the bottom of the shallow harbour. Hundreds of men were trapped in the burning interior, and 1,177 of the *Arizona's* 1,400-man crew were killed in the biggest disaster in US naval history. High above the gruesome scenes in the port, Fuchida could see that the first attack wave had hit the American battleships and airfields hard. As the other planes returned to the aircraft carriers, he was above Pearl Harbor, ready to watch the next attack wave. 168 aircraft had taken off from the aircraft carriers one hour after the first wave and now approached rapidly from the north.

Outside the naval base, civilians had followed the dramatic scenes. Some believed that they were witnessing an exercise while others feared that a Japanese landing was on its way.

Japanese officers were still equipped with swords.

UNDAMAGED PLANES TOOK TO THE SKIES

At 09.00, the next attack wave appeared over Pearl Harbor. The Americans were over the initial shock, and now the port's anti-aircraft guns were manned. Grey-black clouds from exploding shells filled the sky around the Japanese planes, while American pilots scrambled to take

For 70 years, this was one of the most famous images from the attack on Pearl Harbor. But in 2011, the photograph was revealed to have been taken during a fire drill.

any undamaged fighters up into the skies.

Japanese commander Lieutenant Takashige Egusa's 78 Val dive bombers had the most difficult task. His planes had to dive through a fierce barrage of fire and thick oily smoke to hit those battleships that had escaped the first wave of bombing.

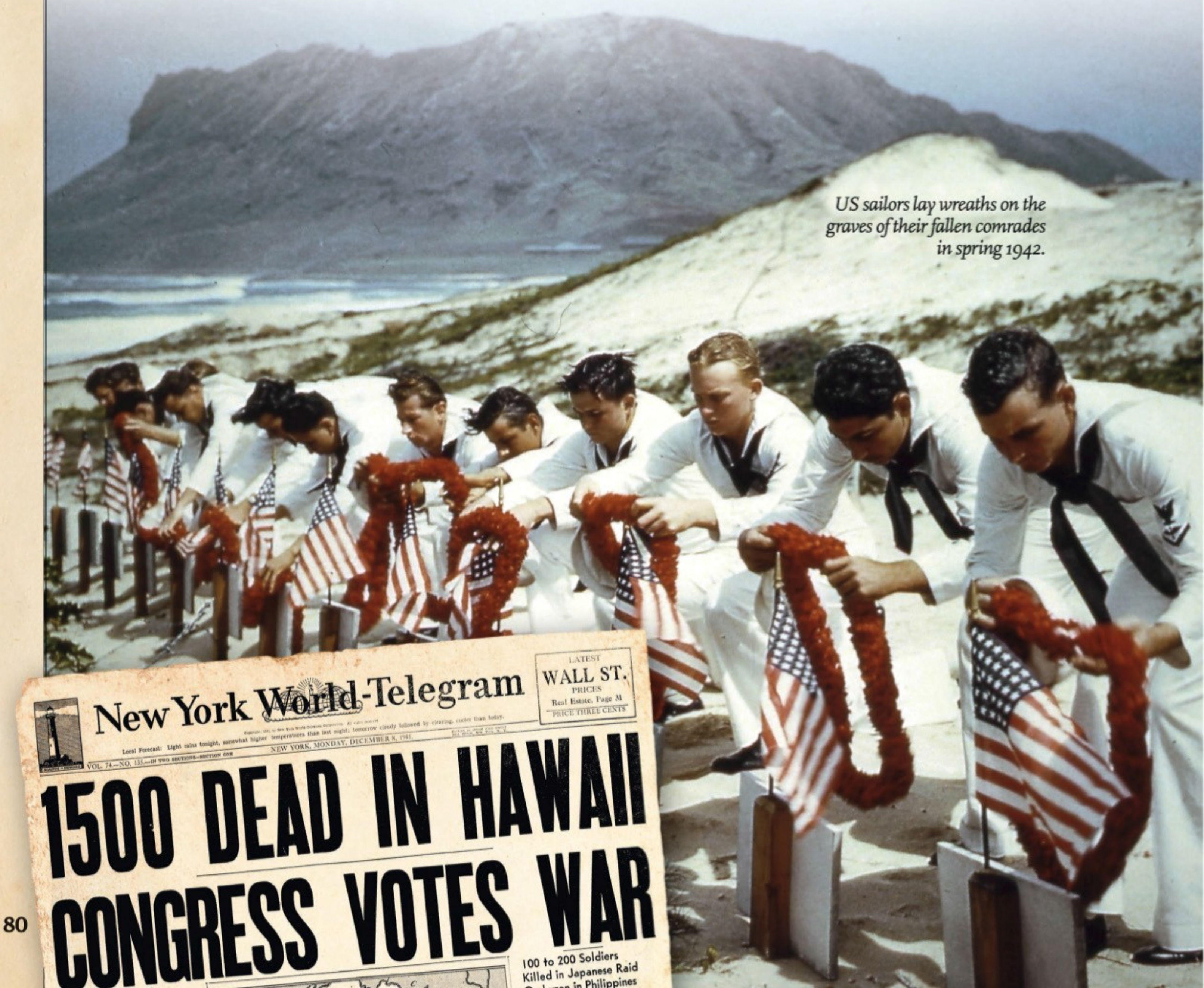
The USS *Nevada* was the only one of the eight that could still manoeuvre, despite having received a direct hit from a torpedo. The 23 Val dive bombers dropped their 250-kg bombs and after a series of explosions, the *Nevada* began to take on water. To save the ship from sinking, the captain ran the ship aground.

JAPANESE SUFFERED MINIMAL LOSSES

As the planes from the attack headed back to the north, a silence descended over Pearl Harbor. At 11.00, Fuchida flew a final circuit and noted carefully which ships had been hit. Two hours later, the commander landed on the aircraft carrier *Akagi*, where he and Admiral Nagumo discussed whether another attack wave should be sent, but decided against it.

American losses were significant: 2,403 people were dead and 21 warships had been sunk or rendered unusable. The Japanese had lost just 29 aircraft and 64 men.

The day after the attack, US President Roosevelt spoke to Congress in Washington. "Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy" were the opening words of his speech, which asked Congress to ratify the decision to take the United States of America into a war against Japan. It was a formality because the Japanese ambassador had already handed over a declaration of war the day before, and on 11th December, Germany and Italy followed suit. Like it or not, the US had been forced into World War II.



US sailors lay wreaths on the graves of their fallen comrades in spring 1942.

New York World-Telegram

LATEST
WALL ST.
PRICES
Real Estate, Page 31
PRICE THREE CENTS

Local Forecast: Light rains tonight, somewhat higher temperatures than last night; tomorrow cloudy followed by clearing, cooler than today.

VOL. 74.—NO. 135.—IN TWO SECTIONS—SECTION ONE

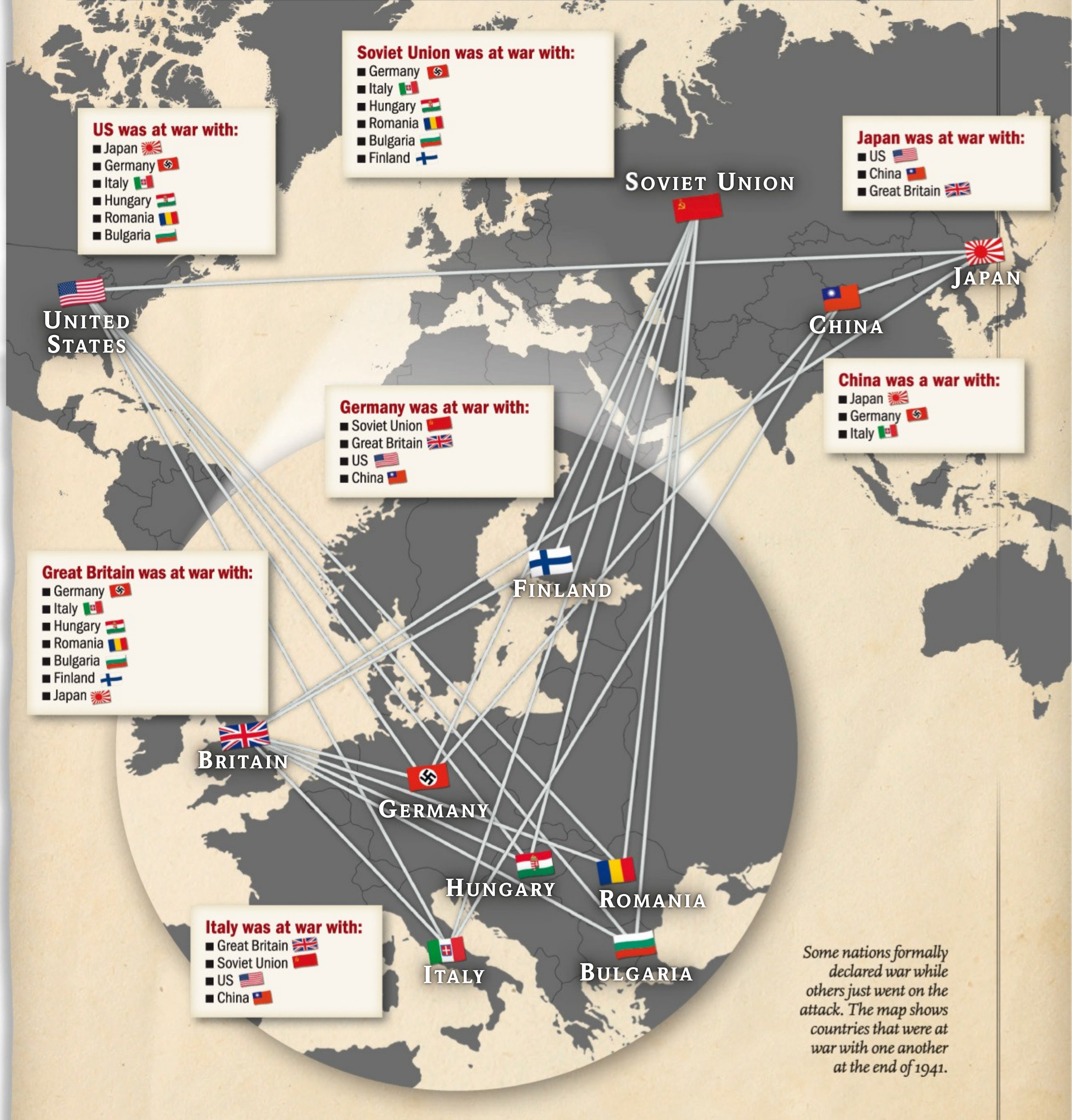
NEW YORK, MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1941

1500 DEAD IN HAWAII
CONGRESS VOTES WAR

100 to 200 Soldiers
Killed in Japanese Raid
in Philippines

Whole world was at war

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 drew the US into the war. Two large blocs now faced one another: the Allies and the Axis powers. By now, the conflict had touched almost every part of the world and was the most widespread in history.


Soviet Union
Japan
United States
China
Finland
Britain
Germany
Hungary
Romania
Italy
Bulgaria

Soviet Union was at war with:
- Germany
- Italy
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Finland

US was at war with:
- Japan
- Germany
- Italy
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria

Japan was at war with:
- US
- China
- Great Britain

China was a war with:
- Japan
- Germany
- Italy

Germany was at war with:
- Soviet Union
- Great Britain
- US
- China

Great Britain was at war with:
- Germany
- Italy
- Hungary
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- Finland
- Japan

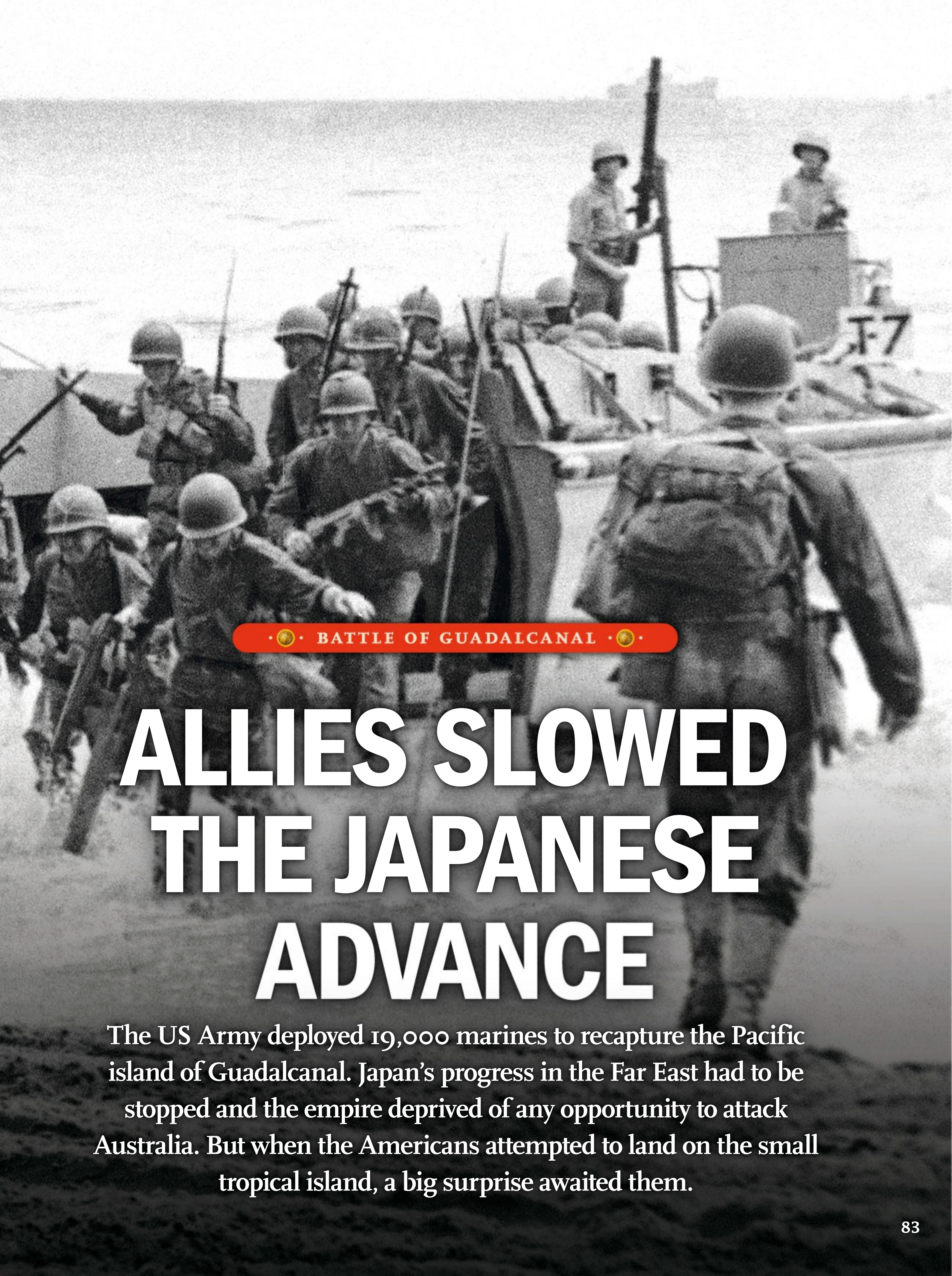
Italy was at war with:
- Great Britain
- Soviet Union
- US
- China

Some nations formally declared war while others just went on the attack. The map shows countries that were at war with one another at the end of 1941.

US warships pummelled the beaches at Guadalcanal for hours before the marines invaded.

1942

3RD JULY



BATTLE OF GUADALCANAL

ALLIES SLOWED THE JAPANESE ADVANCE

The US Army deployed 19,000 marines to recapture the Pacific island of Guadalcanal. Japan's progress in the Far East had to be stopped and the empire deprived of any opportunity to attack Australia. But when the Americans attempted to land on the small tropical island, a big surprise awaited them.

Guadalcanal 1942

THE STAGE IS SET

Solomon Islands
Guadalcanal

The Japanese have thundered through most of East Asia and taken the island of Guadalcanal. On 3rd July, the Allies discover the Japanese are building an airbase there, threatening Australian supply lines. Now, Guadalcanal must be recaptured at all costs and the US is ready bring hell to the tropical island to do it.

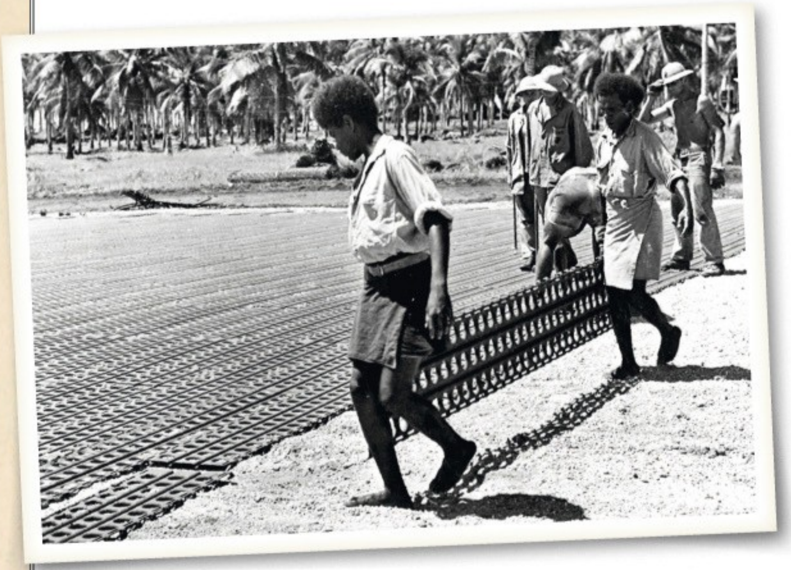
Several hundred marines stood along the starboard rail of the USS *American Legion* The recent day's chatter about sweethearts and chasing girls had given way to an uneasy silence. The only sound came from the water slapping the sides of the ship.

5,336 km² is the area of the island of Guadalcanal, smaller than New Zealand. The island is almost entirely covered by impenetrable jungle and is named after a Spanish village.

Through powerful binoculars, Colonel LeRoy Hunt and his marines contemplated the jagged black peaks, which were just visible as the day's first light hit the Pacific island of Guadalcanal. The men's hearts were thumping, yet strangely, no shots came from the enemy's coastal batteries.

At 06.14, a shell finally broke the silence as a US destroyer began bombing Japan's defensive positions. Soon, salvo after salvo was heading towards Guadalcanal, lighting up the beaches and providing a perfect beacon for a group of Dauntless bombers to drop their loads. The aircraft had taken off from aircraft carriers still en route to Guadalcanal. The tropical island's beaches had been turned into a hellish landscape of deadly explosions.

Aboard the *Legion*, engines were stopped and creaking hoists lowered four landing craft into the water. Dawn broke as the first scramble net was dropped, and the marines clambered into the boats. The laborious task lasted almost two hours, but by 08.30, the sea was filled with small black landing craft bobbing up and down, while their crews impatiently awaited the signal to head for land.


Henderson Field was only half-finished when the Americans captured the runway. Natives helped to lay a runway of ridged metal plates that allowed aircraft to land.

As Colonel Hunt scrambled down into one of the last boats, the veteran officer noted that none of the Allied ships had been hit. One marine wondered aloud whether there were any Japanese on the island at all. Another suggested it was some kind of a trap. No-one replied. In front of them lay an unknown island, an unknown landscape and, above all, an unknown fate.

US WAS FORCED TO ATTACK

Guadalcanal had become a key square on the board when the Japanese landed there in May 1942. In itself, the almost uninhabited jungle island didn't have much value, but its location north-east of Australia made it useful. With an airbase, the Japanese could use it to cut the supply line between the US and Australia, and allow the empire to deploy bombers over Australia's east coast.

So, when Japanese ships began unloading engineers and cutting down trees, the Allies were quick to investigate. On 3rd July, an Australian spy confirmed that the Japanese were building an airbase on the island. In Washington, President Roosevelt and his military staff met with other Allied representatives. Their decision was clear: Guadalcanal had to be taken.

The operation was given the code name Watchtower. Its instigators hoped that a successful mission at Guadalcanal might also help them neutralise or retake the big Japanese base in Rabaul on the island of New Britain.

The US was still riding a wave of optimism after its fleet had thwarted the enemy's large-scale attack against Midway in early June. And although the Americans had not yet completed a war-time amphibious operation, everyone was ready. Major General Alexander Vandegrift was appointed command of the 23 transport ships and 19,000 marines allocated to the mission.

Just after 09.00, the first landing craft hit the island's shelving sands. The ramps were dropped and the marines splashed through the shallows and onto the beach, spontaneously firing at the unseen Japanese batteries and bunkers. But after a moment, the Americans realised that there was no return fire. Beach Red, as the landing point had been named, was deserted.

Humidity made it difficult to breathe

Colonel Hunt, who landed on the beach at 09.50, was delighted at the lack of resistance. Not one of his soldiers had lost his life, and minute by minute more forces were pouring on to Guadalcanal. The men dragged up artillery guns and boxes of ammunition, and soon light tanks rumbled along the shore, spraying up water.

Men who had thought they were going to stab their freshly sharpened bayonets into their enemy's skulls now used them to skewer coconuts to get at the cool milk instead. But amid the idyll, concerns also arose. Where was the enemy?

"We stared at a wall of jungle just beyond the beach and wondered what it contained", Lieutenant William H Whyte, then 24 years old, later wrote in his memoirs.

Whyte soon had the opportunity to find out when he became part of the force that had to work its way through the dense vegetation to launch an assault on the airbase ten kilometres away. The soldiers were constantly on their guard as they chopped their way forward with machetes. The foliage from the tall trees stole the light, and the air on the ground was so humid that Whyte and his companions had difficulty breathing. The jungle was filled with unfamiliar noises and the soldiers were terrified of poisonous snakes, which they knew slithered around the undergrowth. Metre-high kuna grass reduced visibility to almost zero, and the lack of any map meant the Americans had to rely on compasses alone to steer them towards their target. They constantly came across steep gullies that delayed their advance and it wasn't until the following morning that the troops reached the airfield. No Japanese had attacked them, and the facility appeared abandoned. The barracks lay empty, but the stores were full, with bags of rice, tinned salmon, beer and sake. What struck Whyte most, however, was the huge number of porn magazines.

The Japanese covered their helmets with bamboo to blend into the tropical jungle.

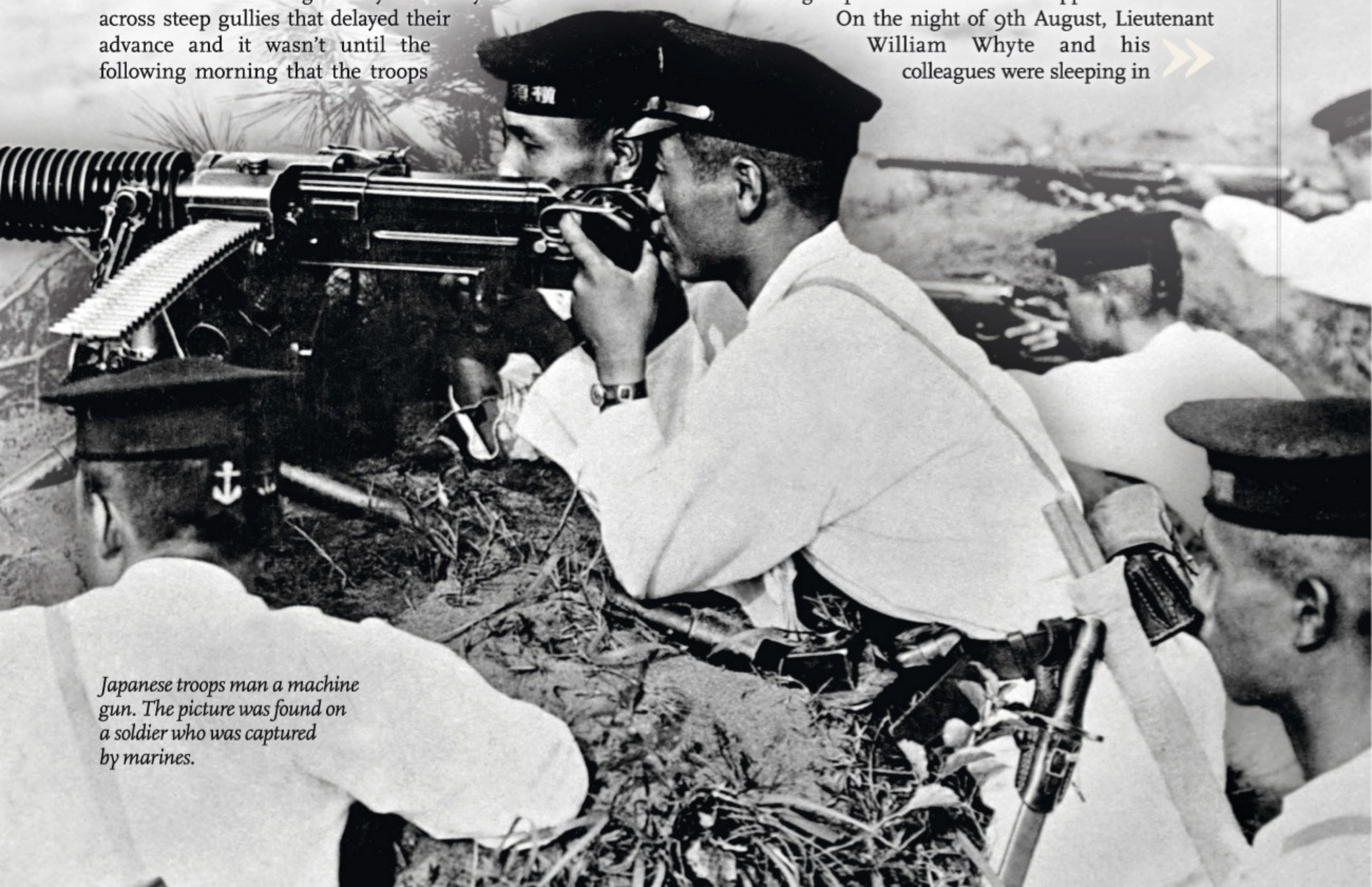
After 24 hours, the invasion of Guadalcanal had succeeded beyond all expectations. Only one soldier was seriously injured – because his machete had slipped while he was trying to open a coconut. The men slapped each other on the back, unaware that their stay on the island was about to develop into six months of gruelling fighting.

Fleet was rocked by night-time explosions

The reason the Japanese initially chose to stay out of sight was because of their modest numbers. The 500 combat troops stationed on the island had watched uneasily as the Allies approached on the morning of 7th August. The bombardment and sight of hundreds of landing craft prompted the soldiers, engineers and workers to retreat deep into the jungle.

However, the Imperial Japanese Navy had in no way abandoned Guadalcanal. From Rabaul, Japan's main base in the Western Pacific, Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa sailed with a squadron of heavy cruisers to attack the anchorage off Guadalcanal, where the Allied fleet was still lying. Only the US's three aircraft carriers had left the area, which left the remaining ships without critical air support.

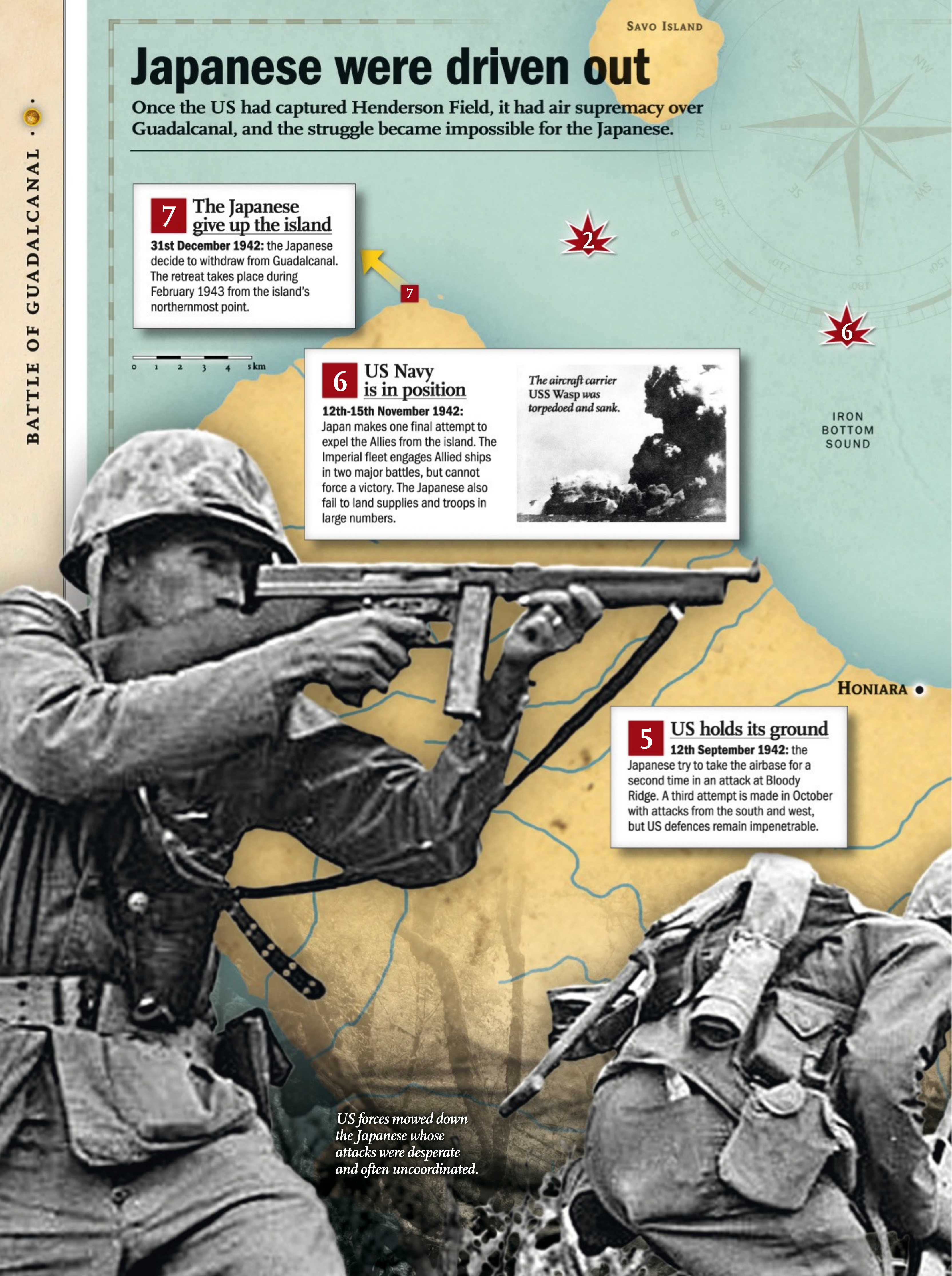
On the night of 9th August, Lieutenant William Whyte and his colleagues were sleeping in »



Japanese troops man a machine gun. The picture was found on a soldier who was captured by marines.

Japanese were driven out

Once the US had captured Henderson Field, it had air supremacy over Guadalcanal, and the struggle became impossible for the Japanese.



7 The Japanese give up the island

31st December 1942: the Japanese decide to withdraw from Guadalcanal. The retreat takes place during February 1943 from the island's northernmost point.

6 US Navy is in position

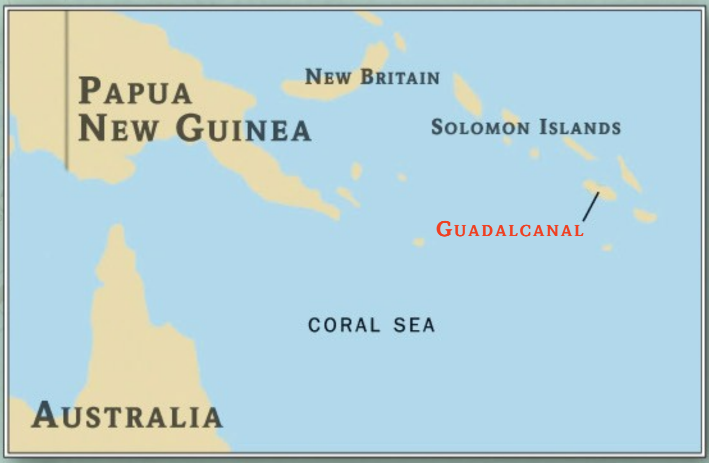
12th-15th November 1942: Japan makes one final attempt to expel the Allies from the island. The Imperial fleet engages Allied ships in two major battles, but cannot force a victory. The Japanese also fail to land supplies and troops in large numbers.

The aircraft carrier USS Wasp was torpedoed and sank.

5 US holds its ground

12th September 1942: the Japanese try to take the airbase for a second time in an attack at Bloody Ridge. A third attempt is made in October with attacks from the south and west, but US defences remain impenetrable.

US forces mowed down the Japanese whose attacks were desperate and often uncoordinated.

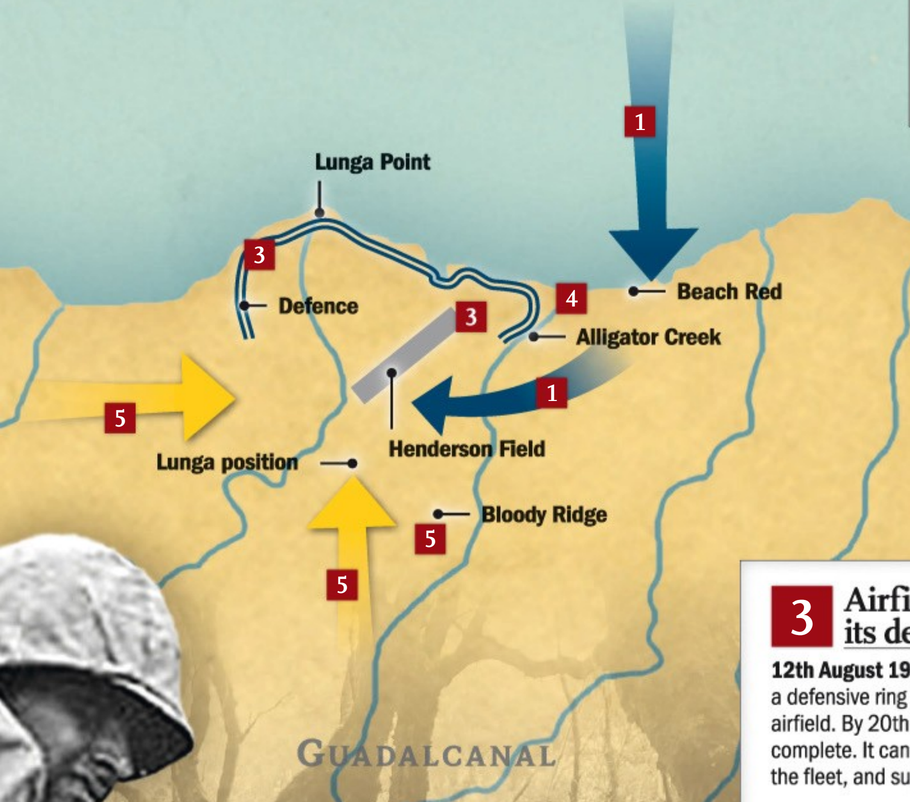

PAPUA NEW GUINEA
NEW BRITAIN
SOLOMON ISLANDS
GUADALCANAL
CORAL SEA
AUSTRALIA

Unknown jungle island played a key role in the war
Not many had heard of Guadalcanal before the war. But after the bloody battles, the island became central to American military history when the victory showed it was possible to push the Japanese back.

1 US reaches Beach Red

7th August 1942: marines land at Beach Red. The soldiers penetrate the jungle and occupy Henderson Field the following day without any resistance. Troops also invade the island of Tulagi north of Guadalcanal, which is taken after a day's fighting.

The soldiers went from the landing craft without knowing what was waiting on the hot, disease-ridden island.


TULAGI
1
Lunga Point
3
Defence
3
4
Beach Red
Alligator Creek
1
5
Henderson Field
Lunga position
Bloody Ridge
5
5
GUADALCANAL

2 Allied fleet forced back

9th August 1942: Japanese ships and planes sink four American destroyers between Savo Island and Guadalcanal, forcing the US Navy to withdraw and isolating the troops on land. 1,077 sailors lose their lives.

3 Airfield strengthens its defences

12th August 1942: the Americans form a defensive ring around the captured airfield. By 20th August, the runway is complete. It can provide air support to the fleet, and supplies can be flown in.

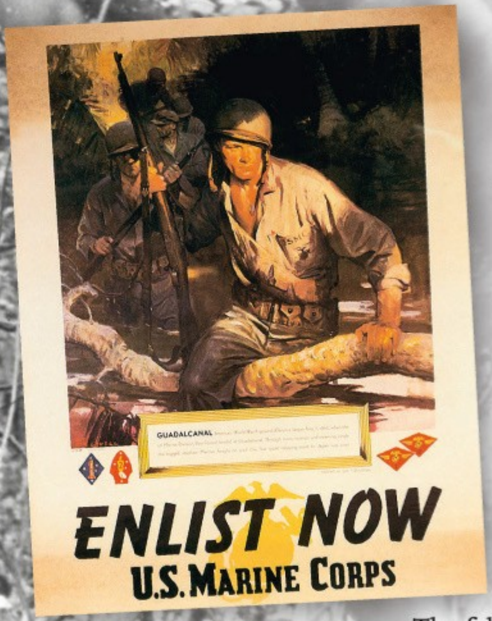
VANILLA CARAMELS
Old Gold

The troops' supply situation improved as soon as the airfield was ready.

4 Strong bastions stop Japanese

21st August 1942: the Japanese start their first big land offensive. They are slaughtered by US grenades and fierce machine-gun fire near the Tenaru River – which the Americans call Alligator Creek.

🟦 Allied forces
🟨 Japanese forces
✸ Naval battle
0 Position



The victory at Guadalcanal made it easier for the US Army to recruit new marines.

the barracks that the enemy had abandoned when a loud roar woke everyone. The men raced towards the beach, where they could hear one crash after another. They stood in silent clusters under the palm trees, while flashes from Japanese, American and Australian ships lit up the sky. Long, colourful arcs of light connected the ships, and finished with fiery explosions that rocked the metal giants.

"It was a spectacular sight – ships exploding in the rocket's red glare. We had no idea who was winning," Whyte wrote later.

The following morning, the Americans and Australians received their answer. The dawn revealed a mass of Allied corpses and debris washed up on the beach. The transport ships that were still intact landed the troops' remaining supplies, then quickly sailed away for fear of a new Japanese attack. The naval battle had cost 1,077 Allied seamen their lives, while three cruisers had been sunk, and three other warships were severely damaged.

TROPICS DRAINED THE TROOPS

Vandegrift's top priority was to complete the airbase's runway so that the US could airlift supplies to Guadalcanal. With 19,000 mouths to feed and only limited rations, the general knew that it would be a race against time.

Soldiers from four battalions also began setting up a defensive ring around the facility, while exhausted marines dragged machine guns and anti-tank guns to the beach where Vandegrift expected most of the coming attacks.

While the defences were established, other marines completed the airfield, which the Americans had dubbed Henderson Field after a Major Lofton R Henderson who'd fallen at Midway. Shirtless rows of men levelled the ground with abandoned Japanese steam rollers. Then, military engineers, aided by native labourers, installed prefabricated interlocking metal plates to stabilise the runway.

The work was sometimes interrupted by the odd Japanese shell churning up the earth, but the Japanese were largely content to wait for their numbers to grow ahead of a major assault. Their troops were being reinforced by destroyers, which regularly shuttled soldiers under the cover of darkness to Guadalcanal from their naval base in the Shortland Islands in a system the Allies dubbed the "Tokyo Express".

In the interim, US troops had to remain wary of Japanese soldiers sniping at them from the treetops. The Japanese also weren't above using unchivalrous tactics. Once, in the middle of August, a small group of Japanese raised a white flag, signalling their surrender. The 17 marines who went to retrieve the group were ambushed and slaughtered by the Japanese. The Allies were disgusted by the act and the Japanese began to be hated. The phrase "the only good Jap is a dead Jap" began to circulate among the marine divisions.

The dense jungle vegetation provided ample cover where enemies could lurk, both in the undergrowth and the treetops.

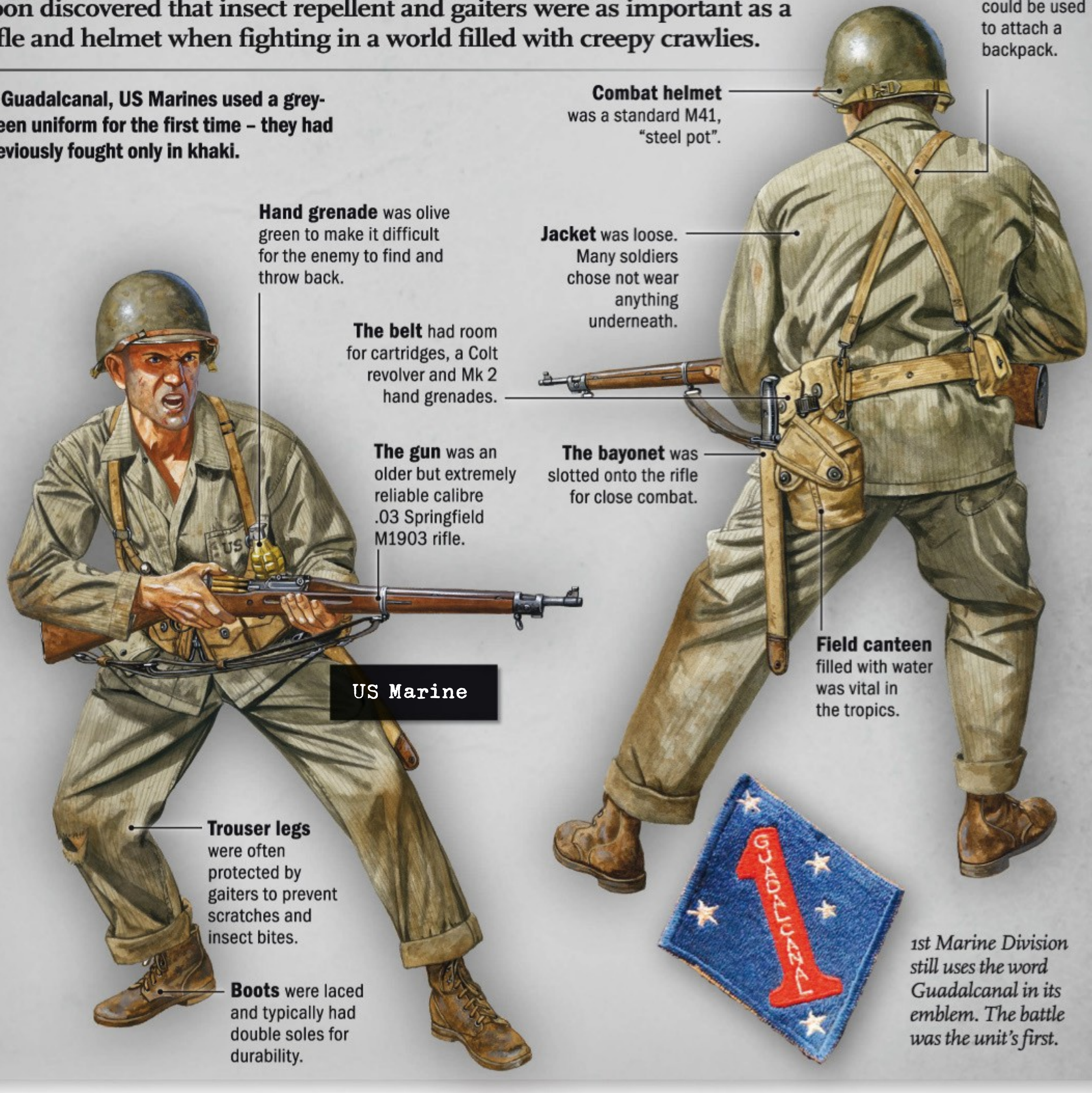
CROCODILES DEVOURED JAPANESE BODIES

The Americans would not have to wait long for revenge. Tactically, it turned out that the Japanese had made a mistake

Jungle war needed special equipment

The US marines didn't know much about jungle warfare at first, but the soldiers soon discovered that insect repellent and gaiters were as important as a rifle and helmet when fighting in a world filled with creepy crawlies.

At Guadalcanal, US Marines used a grey-green uniform for the first time – they had previously fought only in khaki.



Braces were crossed and could be used to attach a backpack.

Combat helmet was a standard M41, "steel pot".

Hand grenade was olive green to make it difficult for the enemy to find and throw back.

Jacket was loose. Many soldiers chose not wear anything underneath.

The belt had room for cartridges, a Colt revolver and Mk 2 hand grenades.

The gun was an older but extremely reliable calibre .03 Springfield M1903 rifle.

The bayonet was slotted onto the rifle for close combat.

Field canteen filled with water was vital in the tropics.

Trouser legs were often protected by gaiters to prevent scratches and insect bites.

Boots were laced and typically had double soles for durability.

1st Marine Division still uses the word Guadalcanal in its emblem. The battle was the unit's first.

by not making a large ground offensive before 20th August, by which point Henderson Field was finished.

Colonel Hunt believed the base's completion raised morale by 20 percent – as soon as the first aircraft touched down on the island, the Allies would be well-equipped to defend Guadalcanal.

The following morning before dawn, the Japanese launched their first large-scale offensive. The target was the Allied positions along the Tenaru River, which the Americans had dubbed Alligator Creek, although it was crocodiles and not alligators that lurked in the water. The Japanese sneaked out of the jungle towards the enemy under the cover of darkness, opening fire with machine guns and mortars – both along the banks of the river and at its mouth on the beach.

As bullets and grenades flew across the river from both sides, fearless Japanese stormed into its slow-moving current, but they were hampered by the river's soft bed, and the Americans were able cut them down with machine-gun fire from their trenches. The Japanese were particularly exposed on the beach, and as dawn broke, US fighter planes were brought into battle.

The pilots flew across the sands at low altitude while holding down the trigger on their machine guns, turning the white beach red with Japanese blood. Many of the bodies had been torn apart by shells,

20 metres was the average distance a marine was from a hostile contact at any time in the jungle. The Japanese were masters at camouflaging themselves in trees.

The Americans took only a few prisoners, as the Japanese soldiers usually preferred to fight to the death. Surrender and capture were both considered dishonourable.

and the fragments of meat and bone were fried by the devastating explosions.

"The smell, two days after the battle of the Tenaru, made a lot of us lose our lunches," noted Colonel Clifton Cates, commander of Whyte's regiment that defended the American line at Tenaru.

Further upriver, Japanese bodies floated in the water, but here the crocodiles helped remove the stench. With voracious appetites, they tore apart the corpses and devoured everything, flesh and bone.

For the Japanese, the offensive had been a disaster, and while the attack's commander, Colonel Kiyonao Ichiki, committed suicide, other officers recognised that the Allies' forces were stronger than the Japanese had expected. Later, in September, when the Japanese attack in the Battle of the Bloody Ridge south of Henderson Field also failed, their suspicions were confirmed: they needed reinforcements.

FRESH TROOPS ROLLED IN

Throughout late September and into the beginning of October, the Tokyo Express was in full swing. At night, Japanese destroyers landed soldiers in areas of Guadalcanal where the Allies had no foothold. The Americans only controlled a small part of the island, so there were plenty of landing sites available – the problem was that the jungle prevented the Japanese from either moving quickly or easily transporting many artillery guns.

Disease also hit the Japanese hard. Dysentery gave the soldiers severe diarrhoea, while malaria poisoned their blood. It was this, in combination with the military defeats, that led the Japanese to call Guadalcanal "Death Island".

600+ planes
were lost by Allies during the battle. Japan's losses – around 800 aircraft – were even higher. Two Allied and one Imperial Navy aircraft carrier were also lost.

The arrival of fresh troops quadrupled the size of the Imperial Army's forces, however, and nearly 20,000 soldiers were ready to retake Henderson Field once and for all.

But the Allies had also spent their time wisely. With air support restored over Guadalcanal, the US Navy warships returned alongside vital transport vessels. A thousand tonnes of ammunition and supplies were shipped in for the hungry marines, and on the coast jeeps were kept ready to drive 3,000 barrels of aviation fuel to Henderson Field. Landing craft also carried 147 new vehicles to the beach along with 4,000 fresh marines – including an artillery unit with 75-millimetre grenade launchers.

Shoes with a split toe made it easier for snipers to climb trees.

NEW MASSACRE SETTLED BATTLE

Japanese commander Harukichi Hyakutake outlined his plans for how Henderson Field should be taken: a smaller force of 3,000 men would make a feint attack west of the runway to fool the Americans into thinking that was where the main attack would come from. But then, 7,000 soldiers would swarm out of the jungle south of Henderson Field in a large-scale attack.

But while it was easy to draw arrows on a map, moving troops around the tropical island was quite different. Every metre's march was strenuous, and the monsoon rain added to the misery by making the ground boggy. On 16th October, Lieutenant General Masao Maruyama, who was in charge of the jungle attack, began his onslaught. With swarms of flies and mosquitoes buzzing around their sweaty faces, the infantry chopped through metre-high undergrowth and fought up and down the muddy gullies. The dense jungle hid soldiers from the enemy's aircraft, but exhaustion bore down on them. The soldiers forced narrow paths through the jungle with machetes, but could not create enough room for their heavy guns, which the Japanese were forced to leave behind.

On 19th October, the planned date of the attack, troops were nowhere near their intended positions. The action was postponed for three days, but the first exhausted troops still did not reach the launch point for the attack until 24th October – while the rest of their men were strung out along the hacked-out jungle pathways.

At the US defensive line south of Henderson Field – Lunga Point – the American soldiers sat in their trenches surrounded by sandbags. They had spent night after night in the muddy holes with machine guns aimed constantly at the jungle. On 24th October at 23.00, while tropical rain beat down relentlessly, a division of Japanese suddenly emerged from the bushes and onto open ground in front of the trenches. The land before the guns had been cleared and covered with long stretches of barbed wire.

"Blood for the Emperor!" screamed the leading Japanese as they ran directly into the Americans' blanket fire. The dying men deliberately threw themselves onto the barbed wire so that their countrymen, coming up from behind in new attacks could use their bodies as a bridge to cross the barbed wire defences. But the American machine guns toppled them like dominoes. Cartridge belts ratcheted through the automatic guns, and the rifles became so hot they had to be cooled with wet jackets. Every machine gun fired 500 shots per minute: the Japanese didn't stand a chance.

At the same time, mortars and grenades were thrown into the jungle, where the remaining Imperial troops were advancing. The explosions tore the limbs from many, yet the Japanese continued attacking undeterred for more than a day.

Early in the morning of 26th October, General Hyakutake acknowledged that his troops were being tasked with an impossible mission. Demoralised, the surviving Japanese fled 35 kilometres back through the jungle while 3,500 of their comrades lay dead in front of the US positions.

The emperor gave up Guadalcanal

The attack was the last major ground offensive by the Japanese. When an attempt to land further reinforcements failed during two naval battles in November 1942, the Japanese gave up on the island. In December, they began to evacuate their remaining forces and by early 1943 the last Japanese troops had gone.

The end of the year also saw Colonel LeRoy Hunt and Lieutenant William Whyte leave the tropical island. The two marines had given the Allies a victory and sent a clear signal that Japan could be beaten. But it had been tough and when the men trudged towards the ships in their tattered uniforms, the months of stress could be seen on their faces.

Robert Leckie, who had fought on the island for six months, described the moment he was dragged exhausted on to his transport ship: "I fell with a clatter next to the others ... my cheek pressed against the warm grimy deck, my heart beating rapidly not from the exercise, but from happiness."

None of the soldiers would miss the jungle fighting, but they would all remember the victory.

Guadalcanal became a turning point

The victory on the tropical island halted Japan's campaign of expansion, but more importantly, it showed Americans the enemy could be defeated.

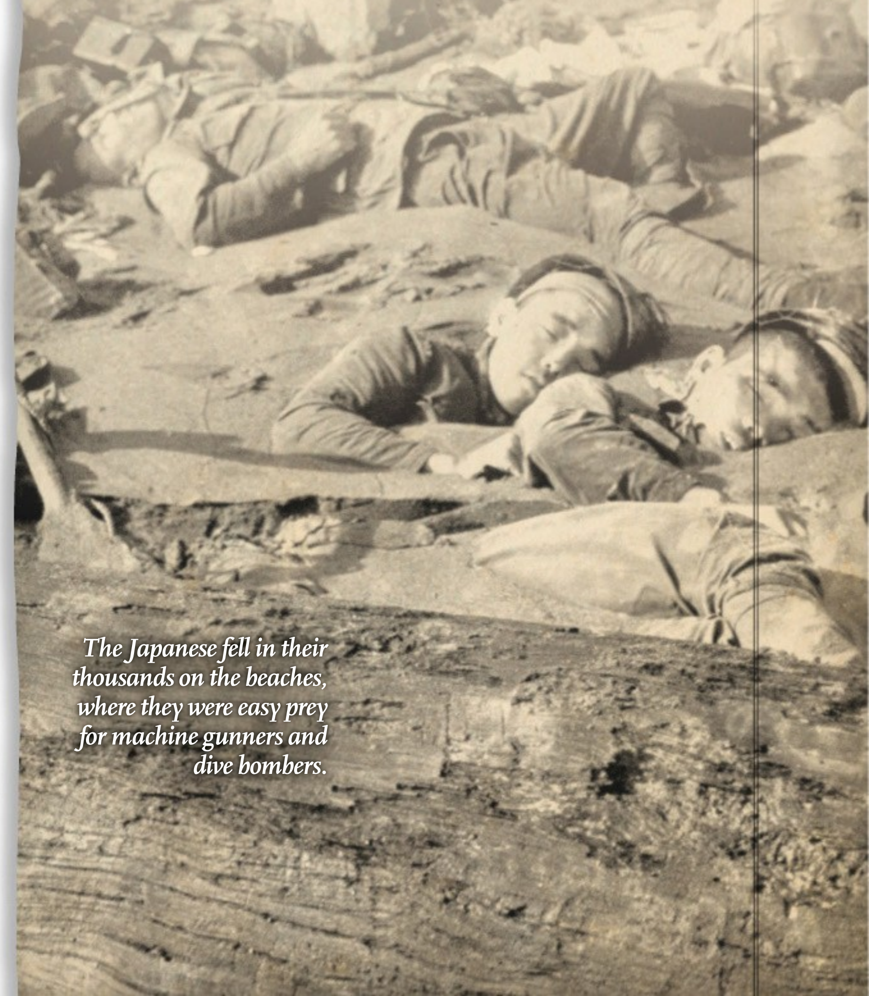
"They charged stupidly ... enough yelling and shouting is furnished to give away the positions ... their marksmanship was poor", noted Lt William Whyte about the Japanese after one battle. His opionions were shared by many others, and optimism grew.

KILLED IN BATTLE In the decisive land battles, the Japanese lost far more soldiers than the Americans, especially because they favoured sending troops forward in head-on attacks.

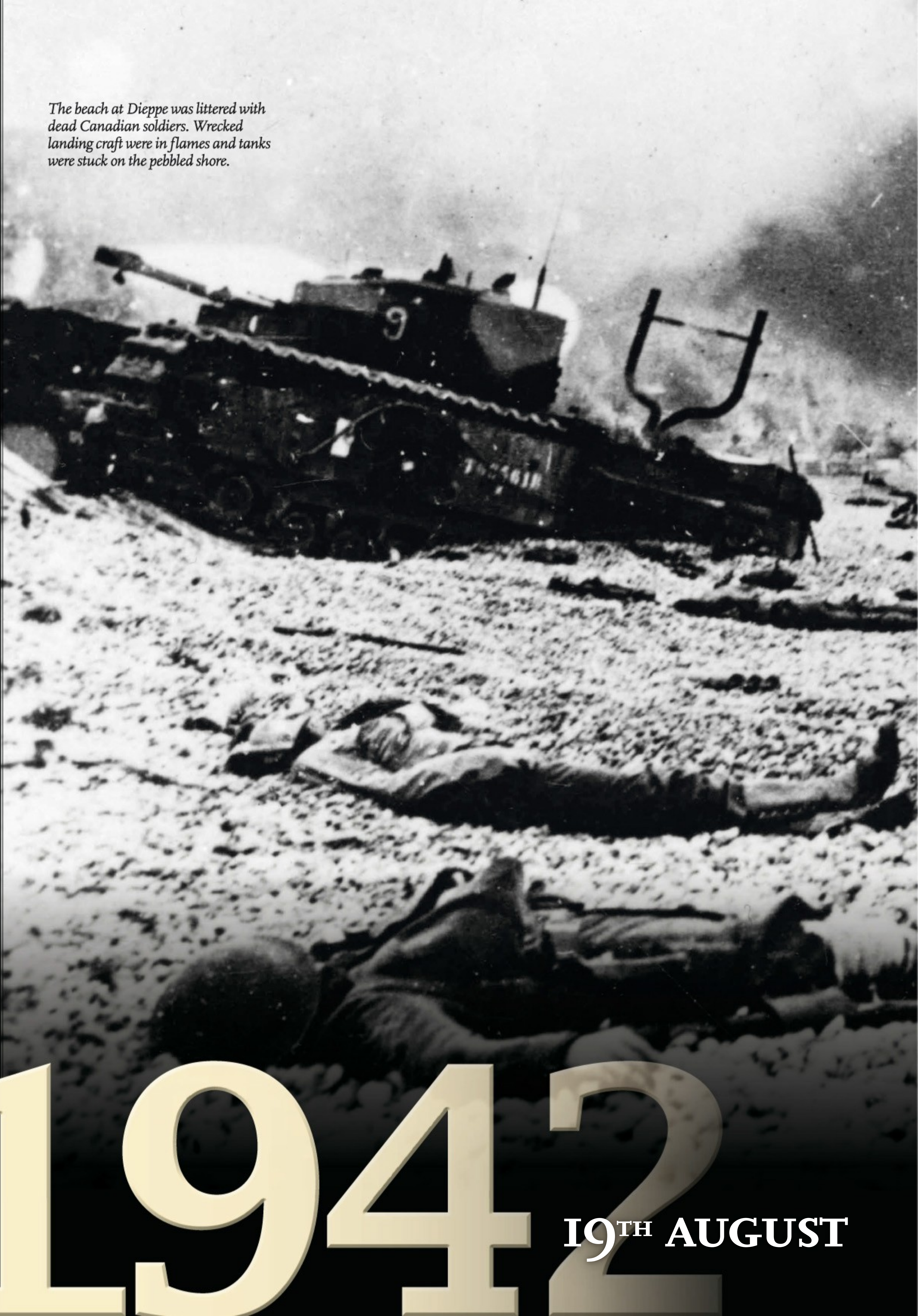
1,600	Americans died from August 1942 to February 1943.
15,000	Japanese soldiers lost their lives in the same period.

DIED IN TOTAL Diseases, including malaria and dysentery, claimed many victims in the tropical climate. A number of sailors and pilots were also killed in naval battles and air combat.

7,100	Americans died for various reasons.
31,000	Japanese never returned from Guadalcanal.



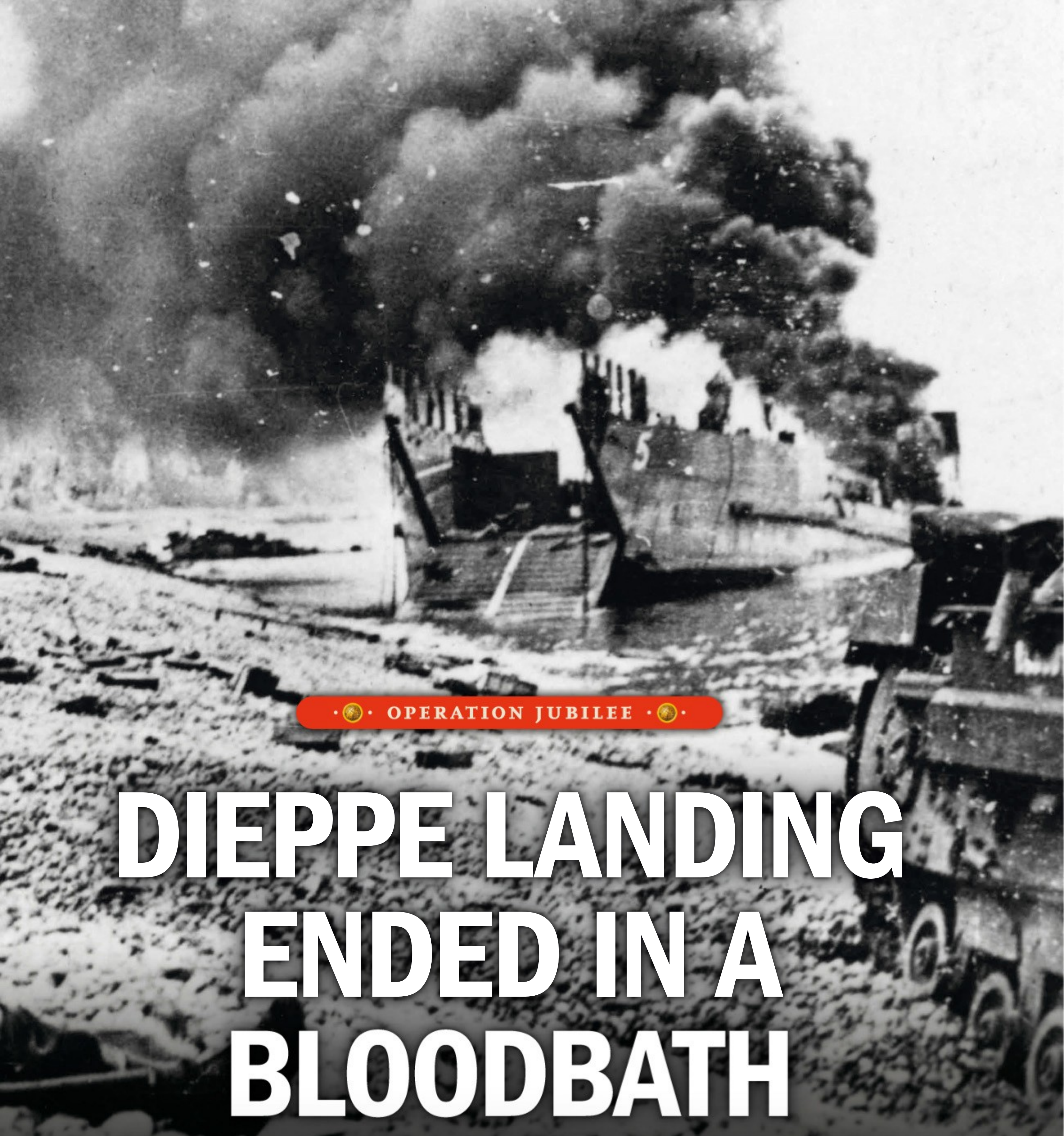
The Japanese fell in their thousands on the beaches, where they were easy prey for machine gunners and dive bombers.



The beach at Dieppe was littered with dead Canadian soldiers. Wrecked landing craft were in flames and tanks were stuck on the pebbled shore.

1942

19TH AUGUST



OPERATION JUBILEE

DIEPPE LANDING ENDED IN A BLOODBATH

Six thousand Canadian and British troops were sent across the English Channel on a dawn raid. They planned to surprise the Germans at Dieppe, destroy the defences there and then pull back, having captured both German officers and documents, but the mission was poorly planned from the start.

THE STAGE IS SET

DIEPPE
FRANCE

Churchill and Roosevelt want to press Hitler on all fronts, but the Allies are not yet ready to mount a full invasion. Instead, they use smaller raids to weaken the Germans and keep the Nazi leadership guessing. A major landing in Dieppe is their most ambitious action to date. Six thousand Allied soldiers stand ready for action.

One warm August night, a fleet of warships and landing craft sneaked out from their ports on the southern coast of England. The fleet of 237 vessels set course for the French coast 110 kilometres away. A pale moon hung above the sea, giving around a nautical mile's worth of visibility. Just over 6,000 soldiers, tense with anticipation, waited aboard the landing craft. Most were en route to their first action, and blissfully unaware of how few of them would return.

The fleet was heading to the French port city of Dieppe to conduct a raid. Since Germany's invasion of France in 1940 and the victory over the British forces at Dunkirk, the British had been launching successful commando attacks against German manufacturing plants, with raids from Norway in the north to Saint-Nazaire in France in the south. The surprise attacks sabotaged military installations, meaning the Germans had to tie up forces to protect their assets in the West, rather than using them in the Eastern offensive.

Action had a bumpy start

Normally, this type of action numbered a few hundred men at most, who, with blackened faces, quickly moved in and out again – preferably before the enemy knew what was going on. The Dieppe raid – codenamed Jubilee – involved more than 6,000 men, plus around 30 tanks and other equipment, and was by far the largest commando raid ever staged.

The coastal town of Dieppe had 34,000 inhabitants and a German garrison of about 2,000 men. The goal of Operation Jubilee was to destroy an airfield and radar six kilometres inland. In addition, the Allied force was to occupy the local German headquarters, find military documents and capture any officers present. Once these objectives had been secured, the soldiers were ordered to retreat to the shore, steal some of the 40 German landing craft in the harbour and sail home.

Around 03.00, the fleet passed the mission's point of no return – the last point at which the mission could be aborted. But their luck would begin to turn 47 minutes later when the vessels were discovered by a small German convoy of gunboats, which was protecting a tanker. The Germans opened fire, but had to retreat quickly. The leading German gunboat lost its radio antenna and messages from other boats did not reach the garrison on land.

However, the exchange of fire woke a German soldier in his bunker, ten kilometres east of Dieppe. He jumped out of bed, wearing nothing but his underwear, and began shooting wildly out to sea with a heavy machine gun, but his firing did not alert the Germans in Dieppe or elsewhere along the coast.

The British fought with bayonets

The Jubilee forces still had the element of surprise when the attack began. The idea was to initiate support actions on both sides of the city to destroy the heavy artillery and machine guns there. That way, the frontal assault against Dieppe would not come under fire from the clifftops. A sheer cliff that stood like a 25-metre-high wall ran along most of the coast, in front of which was a pebble beach, which was narrow that morning due to the high tide.

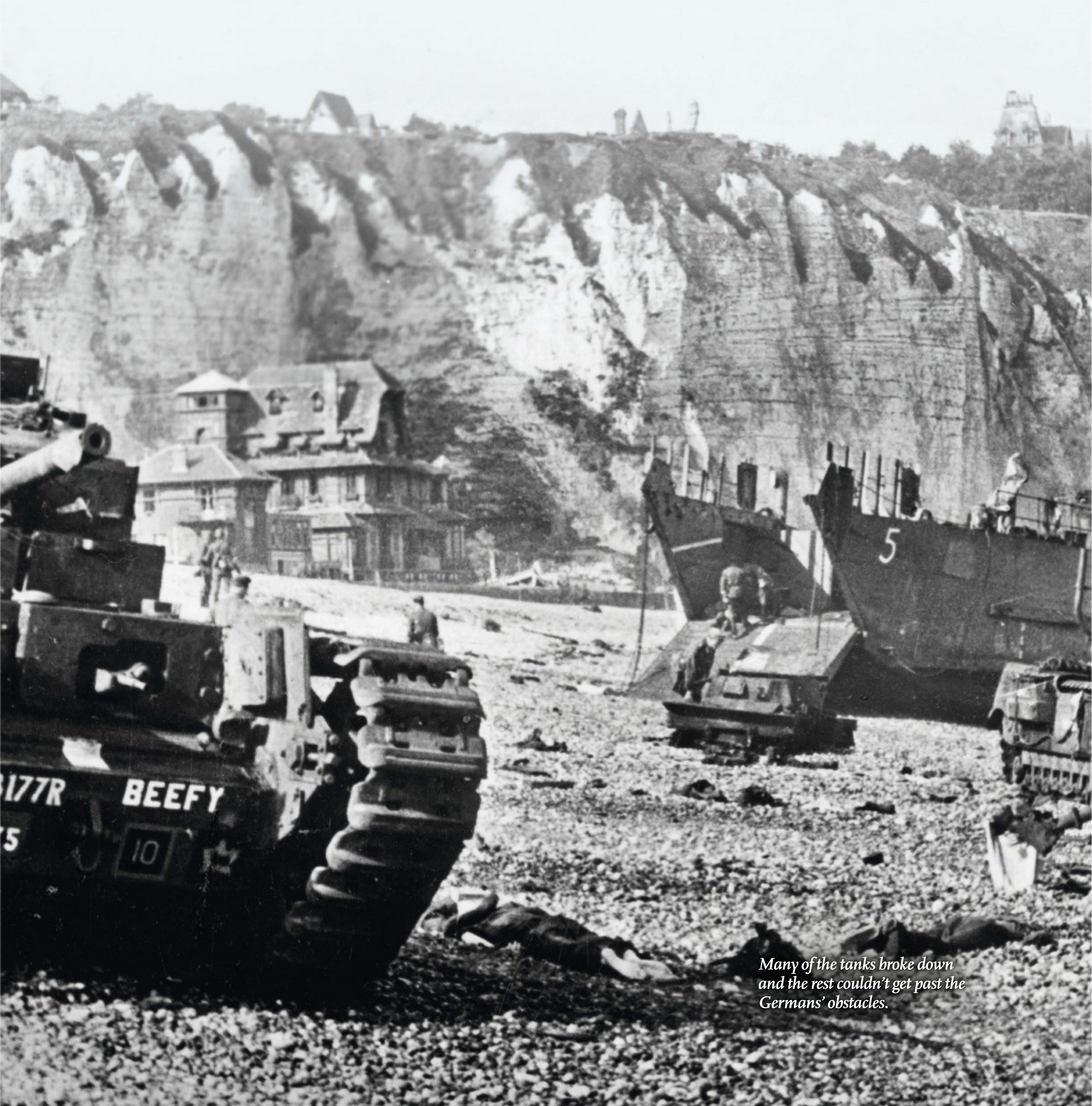
The first support action was launched shortly before dawn, when two British commando units landed on the beach ten kilometres west of Dieppe. The two units, with a total of 200 men, worked their way up the cliff's mined and barbed-wire-clad escarpment without being detected and penetrated one kilometre inland to storm a German artillery battery. With fixed bayonets, the British surprised the enemy in the trenches and bunker system around the guns. The majority of German guards and artillery men were killed, and the artillery pieces destroyed. The objective complete, the unit withdrew to the beach and sailed away. The first part of the mission had been successfully achieved.

Almost simultaneously, another group of British commandos was in action east of the city. The group was divided into two, but one became pinned down by machine gun and sniper fire. The second group was also largely checked, although 20 men did succeed in sneaking up through a ravine to reach their target artillery battery. The group wasn't large enough to storm the post, however. Instead, the soldiers tried to use grenade launchers and small arms to attack the battery, which was continuing to fire at the main landing

The German MG34 machine gun was able to fire 900 shots per minute. It mowed down the Allied soldiers on the beach.

“My regiment put 500 men on the beach, 300 men were killed in less than 20 minutes”

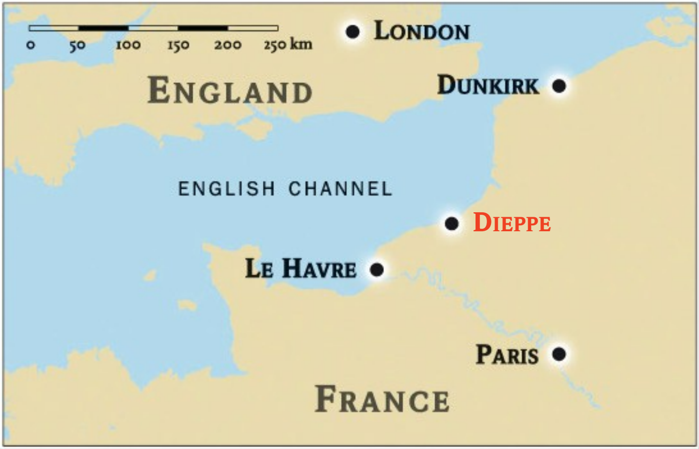
Ron Beal, 19-year-old Canadian soldier



Many of the tanks broke down and the rest couldn’t get past the Germans’ obstacles.

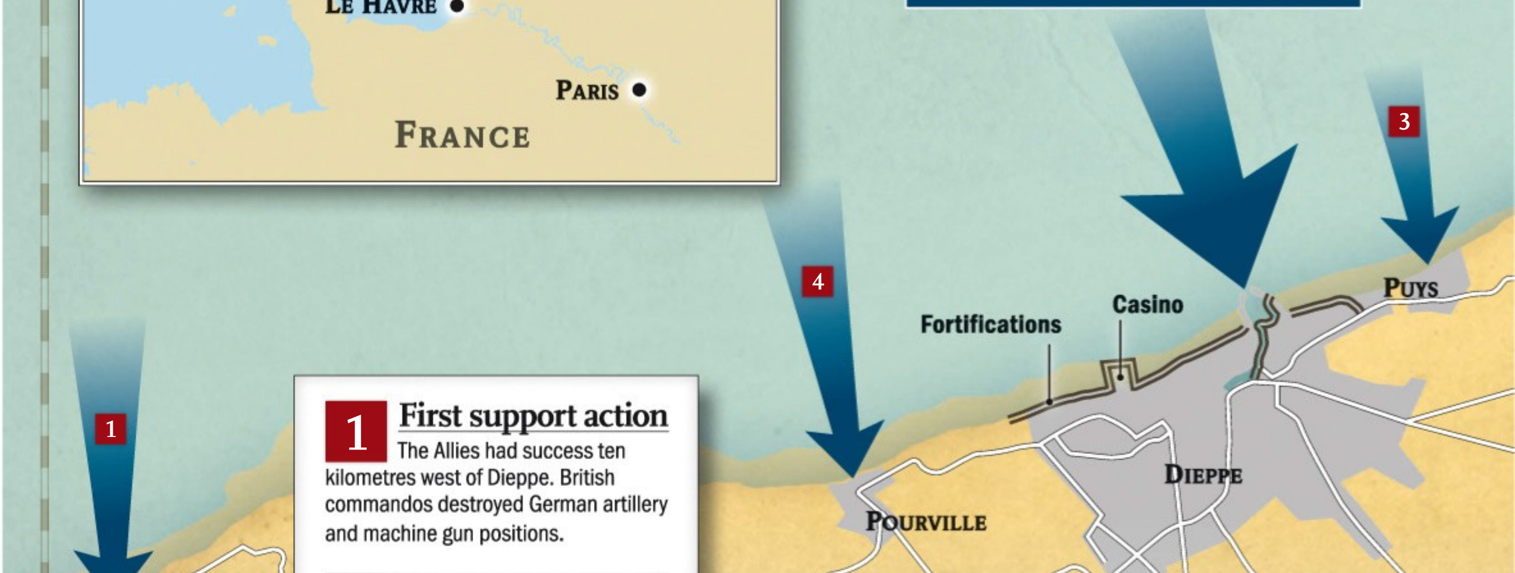
Four actions supported main attack

Before the main frontal assault, the Allies carried out four support actions intended to surround Dieppe and wipe out the German defences on the clifftops, but the actions largely failed and the soldiers in the main force were left stranded on the beach.


0
50
100
150
200
250 km
LONDON
ENGLAND
DUNKIRK
ENGLISH CHANNEL
DIEPPE
LE HAVRE
PARIS
FRANCE

Frontal assault failed

At 05.20, the main force of Canadians landed at the beach in Dieppe, but only a few soldiers managed to reach the esplanade. Hundreds were killed.


3
4
1
Fortifications
Casino
PUYS
DIEPPE
POURVILLE
VASTERIVAL

1 First support action

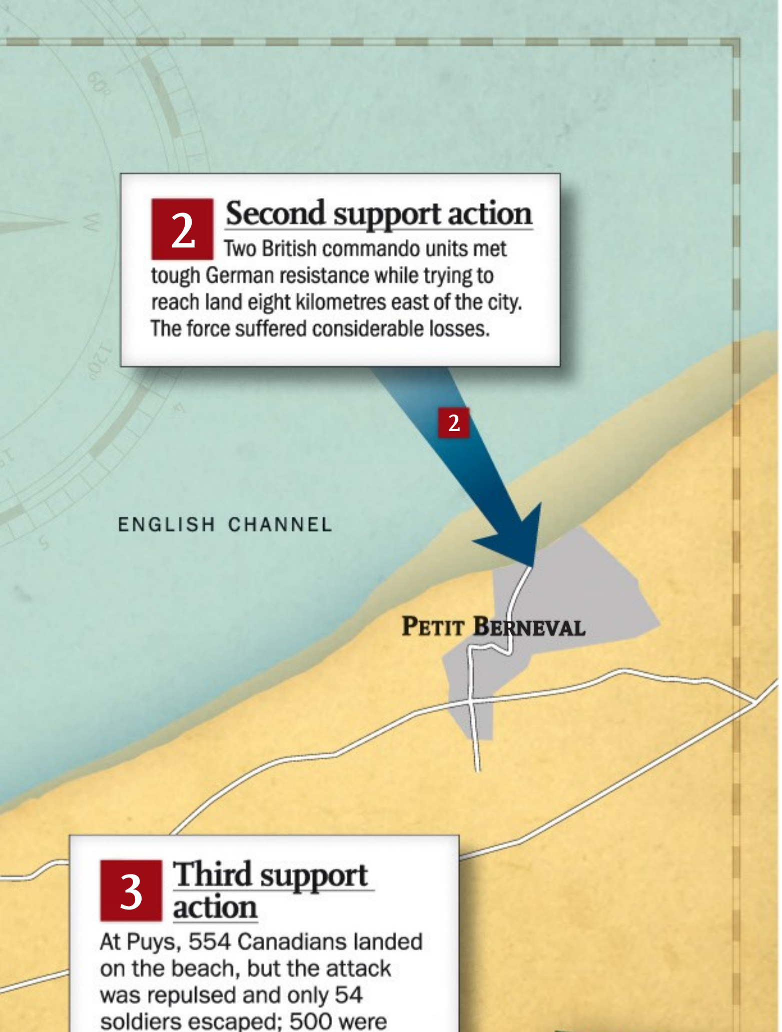
The Allies had success ten kilometres west of Dieppe. British commandos destroyed German artillery and machine gun positions.

Many vehicles were difficult to land.

4 Fourth support action

The Canadians came close to breaking through at Pourville, but after three hours of fighting, they were forced to retreat.

The Allies only occupied the beach for a few hours before they withdrew.



2 Second support action

Two British commando units met tough German resistance while trying to reach land eight kilometres east of the city. The force suffered considerable losses.

3 Third support action

At Puys, 554 Canadians landed on the beach, but the attack was repulsed and only 54 soldiers escaped; 500 were killed, wounded or captured.

DIEPPE
CANADA 1939 1945
VOLUNTARY SERVICE

The Dieppe Medal was awarded to Canadians who participated in the raid.

FACT

MOST WERE CANADIANS

- Canadians made up the greater part of troops at Dieppe. In total, 4,963 Canadian soldiers participated, along with 1,075 British men and 50 US rangers.
- The Allies intended to hold Dieppe for 12 hours, but were forced back after five-and-a-half hours, and after eight hours, all surviving Allied soldiers had retreated or been captured.
- Over 1,000 Allied soldiers lost their lives, while German casualties numbered around 300.

craft that were still lying off the coast. But in the end, the small unit was overpowered. The support action east of Dieppe had been a disaster. Virtually all the British commandos were either killed, wounded or taken prisoner.

GERMAN BATTERIES WERE INTACT

The Canadians' two support actions also failed to penetrate German defences. The Canadians landed closer to Dieppe at the villages of Puys and Pourville. Like the British, their task was to climb the cliffs and destroy all the field and machine guns before the frontal assault on Dieppe was deployed.

The Germans' position at Puys was especially strong, however, and 500 of the 554 Canadians were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The rest managed to escape, but many had to swim back to their ships because most of the landing craft had been shot to pieces before reaching the shore.

On the other side of Dieppe, at Pourville, the Canadians had better luck in surprising the German defenders. The commandos entered the village and moved up through a river valley towards Dieppe, but German reinforcements from inland cut them off. The Canadians fought until 08.45 before retreating to the beach, from where most were evacuated by landing craft.

In all, only the artillery battery west of Dieppe had been put out of commission. The other German positions remained intact, and their stout resistance had prevented the Allies' planned pincer action on the city itself.

Operation Jubilee continued regardless, but now the Allied troops carrying out the frontal attack on Dieppe came under heavy fire from the start. The terrain was also a major challenge. From the water's edge, the pebbled beach sloped up towards a stone wall that sectioned off a further stretch of beach that was covered in barbed wire. Behind the barbed wire was another wall that ran along the city's promenade and the flat esplanade in front of the buildings. In all, the soldiers had to climb a distance of 220 metres from the water's edge up to the esplanade. In one place, however, the distance was shorter: a casino was built on to the promenade itself and jutted out far beyond the rest of the buildings. The Germans had filled the casino with soldiers and placed machine guns in most of its windows.

In addition, the beach was protected by bunkers and trenches – not only at the top of the cliffs, but also dug into caves in the side of the cliff. Those tanks that succeeded in reaching the city found the streets leading from the esplanade towards the centre blocked by large concrete blocks that the British tanks, with their caterpillar tracks, couldn't pass and which needed to be blasted clear by engineering troops.

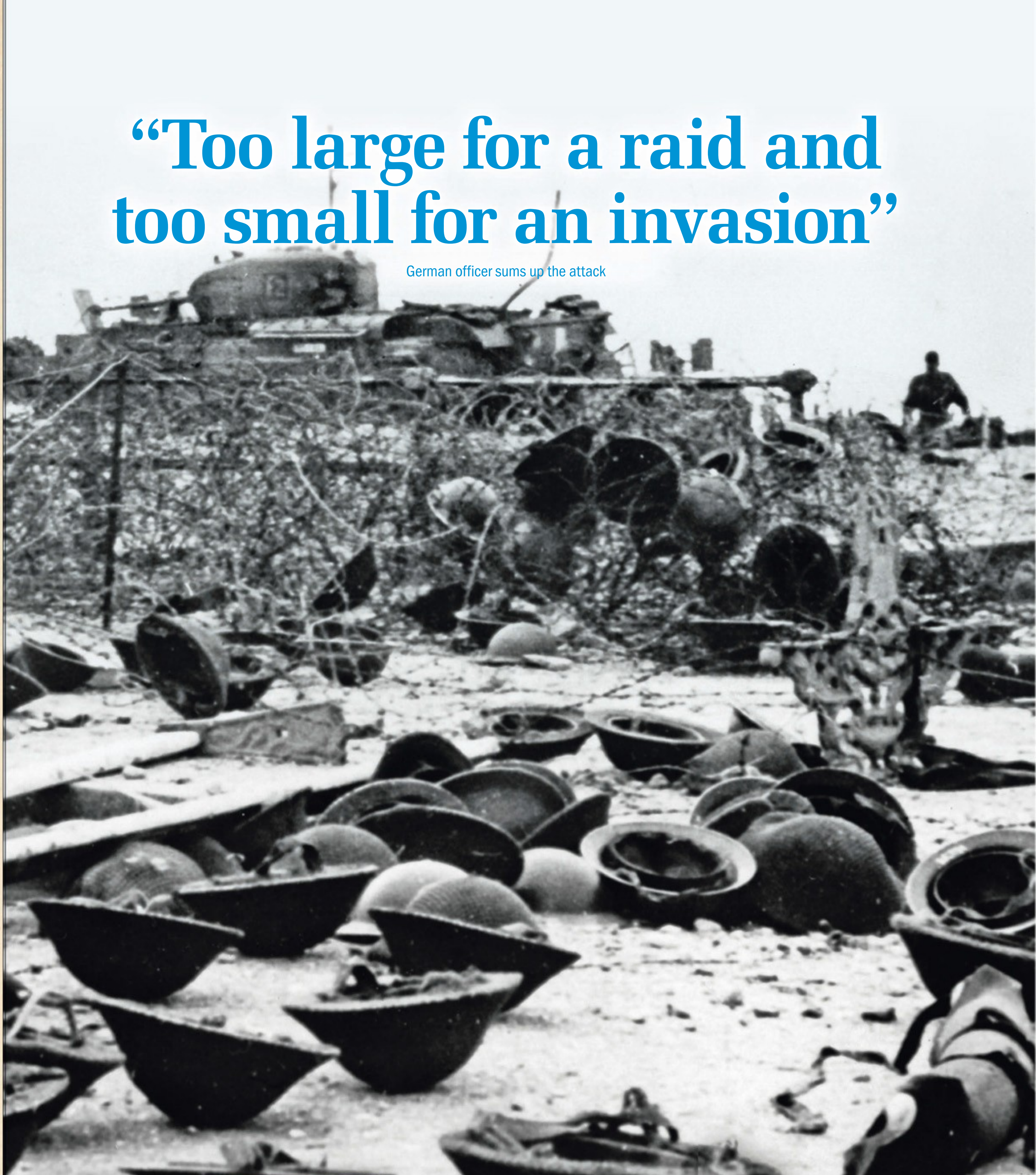
TANKS WERE DESPERATELY DRIVING AROUND

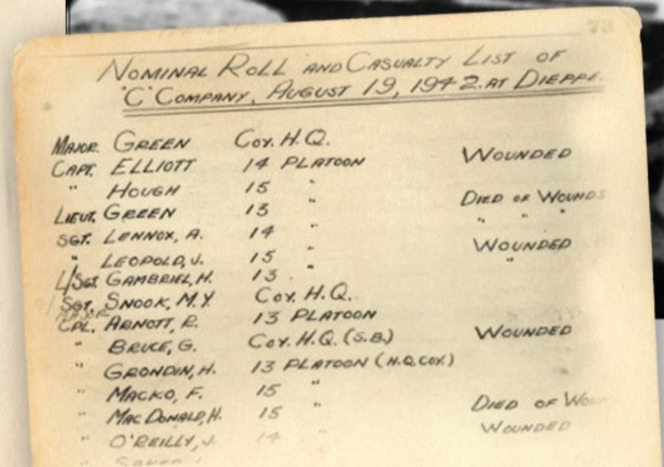
The support actions had warned the Germans in the city that something big was going on. And by 05.00, when the Canadian forces launched the main attack, the garrison was primed for action.

The sun was coming up as the Allies' naval destroyers laid a smokescreen along the coast to hide the approaching landing craft. The first vessels landed at 05.20 and, shortly afterwards, the first tanks arrived. The vehicles were ferried to shore by landing craft that could carry three aboard at the same time. But only a handful of tanks managed

"Too large for a raid and too small for an invasion"

German officer sums up the attack





NOMINAL ROLL AND CASUALTY LIST OF
"C" COMPANY, AUGUST 19, 1942. AT DIEPPE.

MAJOR	GREEN	COY. H.Q.	WOUNDED
CAPT.	ELLIOTT	14 PLATOON	
"	HOUGH	15 "	DIED OF WOUNDS
LIEUT.	GREEN	13 "	" " "
SGT.	LENNOX, A.	14 "	WOUNDED
"	LEOPOLD, J.	15 "	"
L/SGT.	GAMBRIEL, H.	13	
SGT.	SNOOK, M.Y.	COY. H.Q.	
CPL.	ARNOTT, R.	13 PLATOON	WOUNDED
"	BRUCE, G.	COY. H.Q. (S.B.)	
"	GRONDIN, H.	13 PLATOON (H.Q. COY.)	
"	MACKO, F.	15 "	DIED OF WO
"	MAC DONALD, H.	15 "	WOUNDED
"	O'REILLY, J.	14 "	

A company commander's list detailing the fate of his soldiers who fought on the beach at Dieppe.

DIEPPE
1940
1945

Many of the medals for the raid on the French coast had to be awarded posthumously.

to make it all the way from their landing craft's ramp, across the stone wall, through the barbed wire and up to the promenade. Many were stopped by the pebbles, which destroyed the machinery. One tank drove off the ramp too early and sank, drowning its crew, while others were blown apart by German shells.

The landing craft also came under intense fire. Several opened their ramps directly in front of German machine gun positions that quickly mowed down the front rows of Canadian soldiers before they had a chance to reach the shore. In desperation, several Canadians jumped over the sides of the landing craft, where they ended up in water that was too deep for them to stand. Weighed down by ammunition, grenades and backpacks, many drowned, while others, already exhausted, struggled up the beach, some of them without weapons.

However, some Canadians were lucky enough to find cover behind the stone wall or broken tanks. Some managed to cut through the barbed wire and reach the promenade wall, out of the Germans' line of fire. But the salvoes coming from cliffs and buildings were so intense that it would be suicidal to consider pushing on. At the casino, which almost reached the water's edge, the Canadians succeeded in securing the lower floor, but the Germans still had the upper storeys.

Chased by German soldiers, the tanks that had made it to the esplanade drove desperately back and forth, unable to get past the concrete blocks; the engineering troops who should have blown the barriers away lay dead on the beach.

Evacuation ended in panic

There was almost no radio communication to the ships waiting in the English Channel because most of the operators had been shot. With radios strapped to their backs and antennas swinging above their heads, they made obvious targets for German snipers.

Still stationed aboard his ship, Canadian Major General John Hamilton Roberts, who had command of Operation Jubilee, therefore received few reports from the shore. Worse, the smokescreen that the destroyers had put out prevented those on the ships from seeing what was happening on land. Unfortunately, the few reports that did come through suggested that the attack was going well. Roberts had been told that Allied soldiers had entered the city. That was true, so far as it went, but in fact there were only two small groups and both were quickly pushed back. Nevertheless, the positive reports prompted the general to send in the reserves to complete the attack. But the new soldiers soon became mired in the same hopeless situation as their comrades.

It was only at 09.00 that Roberts realised that the lack of reports was due to heavy casualties. The general immediately ordered a retreat, and the remaining landing craft set out to retrieve the troops.

Unfortunately, there weren't enough. A large number of the vessels had long been holed, sunk or had capsized. So, when the too-small fleet of rescue craft emerged from the smokescreen at 10.20, the surviving soldiers on the beach panicked. The men charged to the water's edge and desperately tried to climb aboard, overloading many of the landing craft as a result. Several vessels capsized, while others ran aground because they were too heavy. Meanwhile, German gunfire continued unabated, and even more soldiers were killed during the evacuation than in the attack. Of the first eight vessels to reach the beach, only two escaped. Some soldiers did manage to get off the beach later; around 400 made it to the ships, but by noon the Germans' fire had made the water's edge too dangerous for further rescue attempts. The survivors were stranded and became German prisoners of war.

Out of the original force of just over 6,000 men, 1,200 died on the beaches of Dieppe, while 3,800 were taken prisoner.

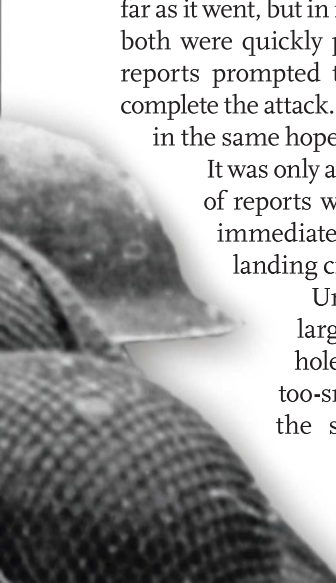
After the battle, a baffled German officer asked a captured Canadian officer: "We know very well it was too large for a raid and too small for an invasion. So what was it?" The aptly named Major McCool replied, "If you can tell *me* that, I would be exceedingly grateful."

Leaders shunned responsibility

In fact, no one has ever received a full answer to the question. After the operation, the prime minister, Winston Churchill, gave the impression that he knew very little about the plan's details, while the officers responsible for planning Jubilee stayed silent or made excuses. For example, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, who was in charge of the action, claimed that Jubilee offered the Allies experience of major landing operations that would benefit them when they came to invade mainland Europe. Mountbatten stated after the war that "for every soldier who died at Dieppe, ten were saved on D-Day".

For the rest of his life, Mountbatten was convinced that he had not ordered a pointless action or done anything wrong. When writer Richard Hough asked him several years after the war why he had not commissioned someone to write his biography, he replied:

"It is a curious thing, but a fact, that I have been right in everything I have done and said in my life... No one would believe a biographer who made this claim while I was still alive because readers would



NAME **LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN**

TITLE ADMIRAL

1900–1979

Officer believed he was infallible

Lead planner Admiral Lord Mountbatten never saw the action as a failure. On the contrary, he believed that the action saved many lives on D-Day. This assessment of the raid was perhaps a result of Mountbatten's unwavering self-belief: he often claimed that he had been right in everything he had ever said and done during his life!

- **Was the last Viceroy of India.**
- **Was murdered by the IRA in 1979.**

Unruly Canadians needed a fight

Around 200,000 Canadian soldiers were on standby in southern England and it was time to see action – or so their commanders believed.

Canada was a former British colony that was granted independence in 1931. From the beginning of the war, Canada backed Britain.

In 1942, approximately 200,000 Canadian soldiers, all volunteers, stood on English soil. The first had arrived as early as 1939, so by 1942, some of them had spent three years training and guarding the Channel coastline. Far from home, the soldiers were becoming restless and their commanders were struggling to maintain discipline – in the 20 months leading up to Operation Jubilee, more than 21,000 offences relating to drunkenness and other forms of anti-social behaviour were recorded. So when the Canadian commander in England, Lieutenant General Andrew McNaughton, was asked to provide troops for a commando raid, he was quick to agree.

conclude that I had caused it to be written, that I was leaning over the author's shoulder."

But even such astonishing arrogance cannot hide the fact that none of Operation Jubilee's planned objectives was achieved and that the soldiers were given an impossible task. German Lieutenant General Conrad Haase, who was at Dieppe, later claimed that it was "incomprehensible" that the Canadian troops were expected to advance "when the strength of [their] naval and air forces was entirely insufficient to suppress the defenders during the landings".

One of the reasons for the lack of support was that the Royal Navy refused to provide battleships. Battleships carried 200-mm guns, which could have shattered the German positions on the clifftops far more effectively than the 100-mm guns of the destroyers. The admiralty, however, refused to risk losing battleships during an action that was not a real invasion. Air support was also missing. British fighters did strafe German positions with machine gun fire just before the attack, but didn't drop bombs to spare the civilian population.

AIRBORNE ASSAULT WAS ABANDONED

Another problem was that the entire attack came from the shoreline, where the German defences were strongest. In the original plan, airborne troops would have landed in gliders in the flat hinterland to attack the positions on the clifftops from behind, but the idea was abandoned because poor wind conditions could have scuppered the operation.

Finally, the chain of command was a mess, with commanders from the army, navy and air force. A single leader could have provided more cohesion, and forced the admiralty to deploy battleships.

The British learned from their experience at Dieppe, however, and later always had a single commander responsible for an entire operation, regardless of how many forces were involved.

On the 1st September 1944, three months after D-Day, Canadian soldiers returned to Dieppe to pay their respects.

"As soon as we got off the landing craft...it was murder"

Don Wolfe, 21-year-old Canadian soldier

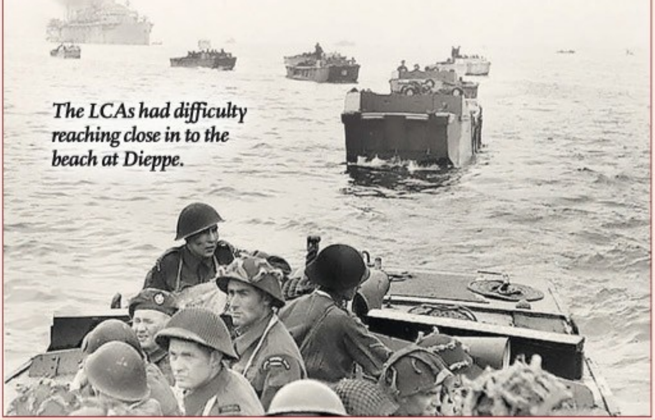
Hard lessons helped on D-Day

The heavy losses suffered during Operation Jubilee were not in vain. The Allies rethought their command structure, tactics and weapons technology – all of which helped them succeed on D-Day.

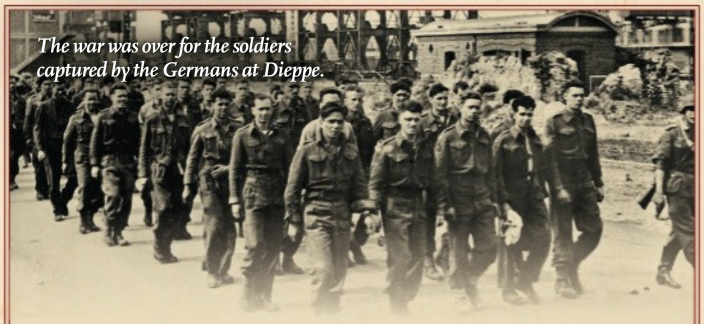
Vessels were adapted

■ **Jubilee:** The rectangular, steel-reinforced wooden LCAs (Landing Craft Assaults) used to ferry the soldiers at Dieppe had relatively deep draughts, which made it difficult to land soldiers tight up to the beach, where the water was shallow.

■ **D-Day:** Soldiers were landed in flat-bottomed vessels, known as LCVP (Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel), which were able to sail right up to the shore and disembark troops by opening a flap in the hull.



The LCAs had difficulty reaching close in to the beach at Dieppe.



The war was over for the soldiers captured by the Germans at Dieppe.

Attacks were made in force

■ **Jubilee:** The operation was conducted with a limited number of soldiers – only around 6,000 men went ashore at Dieppe.

■ **D-Day:** A powerful force of 133,000 British, Canadians and Americans invaded Normandy on D-Day.

No joint commanders

■ **Jubilee:** Commanders from the army, air force and navy jointly oversaw the operation.

■ **D-Day:** US General Dwight D Eisenhower was made leader of Allied forces and given overall command responsibility.

As commander-in-chief, Eisenhower was the ultimate authority over all aspects of D-Day.

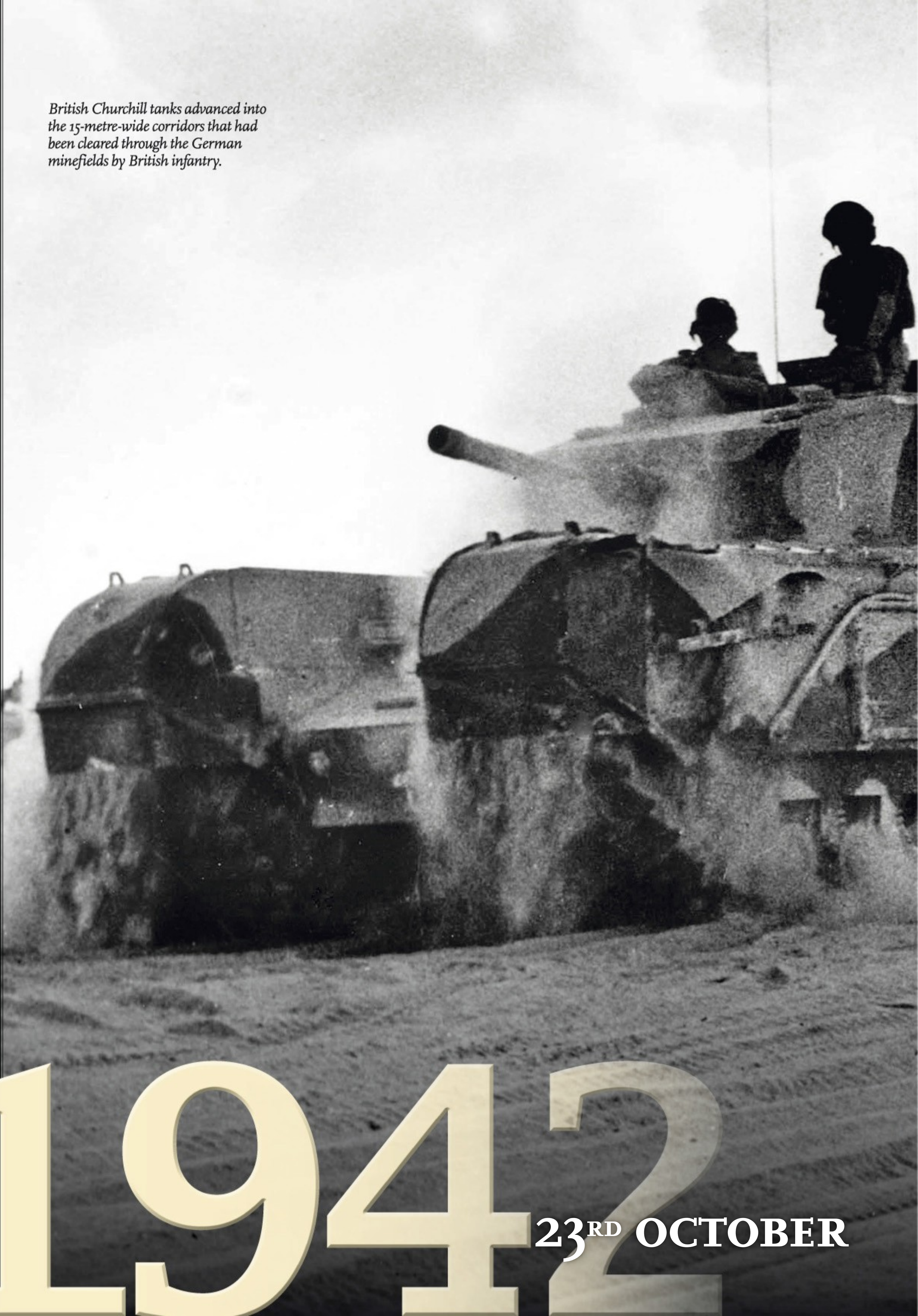
Dwight D Eisenhower

Tanks were fitted with specialist equipment

■ **Jubilee:** Engineers had to clear away concrete barriers and other obstacles before the tanks could move forward. The soldiers also had to cut through barbed wire defences themselves.

■ **D-Day:** Specially designed tanks were deployed that could destroy concrete barricades and cut barbed wire without endangering infantry and engineering troops.

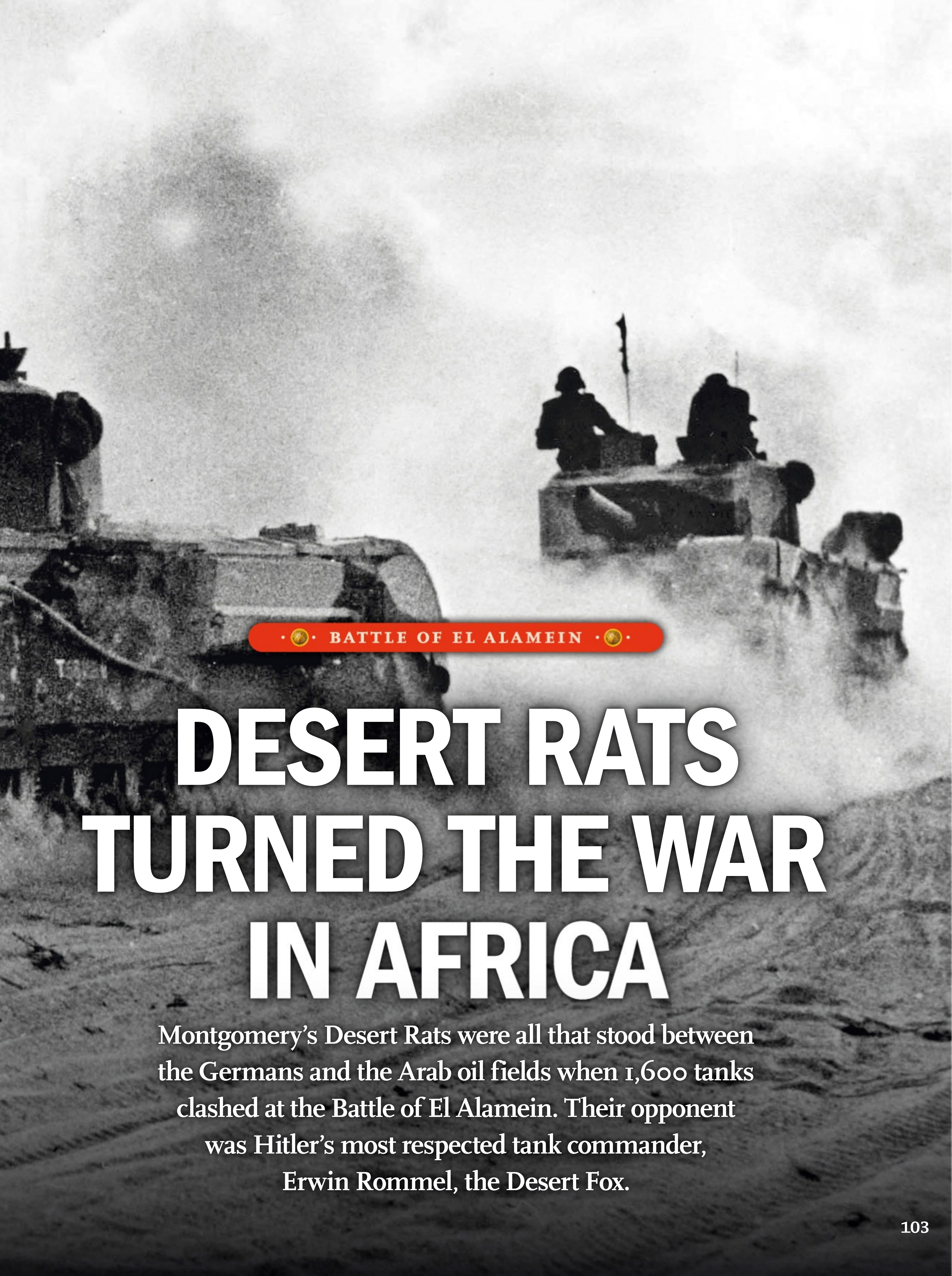
The soldiers in the first wave of attack were particularly vulnerable to enemy bullets.



British Churchill tanks advanced into the 15-metre-wide corridors that had been cleared through the German minefields by British infantry.

1942

23RD OCTOBER



BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

DESERT RATS TURNED THE WAR IN AFRICA

Montgomery's Desert Rats were all that stood between the Germans and the Arab oil fields when 1,600 tanks clashed at the Battle of El Alamein. Their opponent was Hitler's most respected tank commander, Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox.

THE STAGE IS SET

El Alamein
Egypt

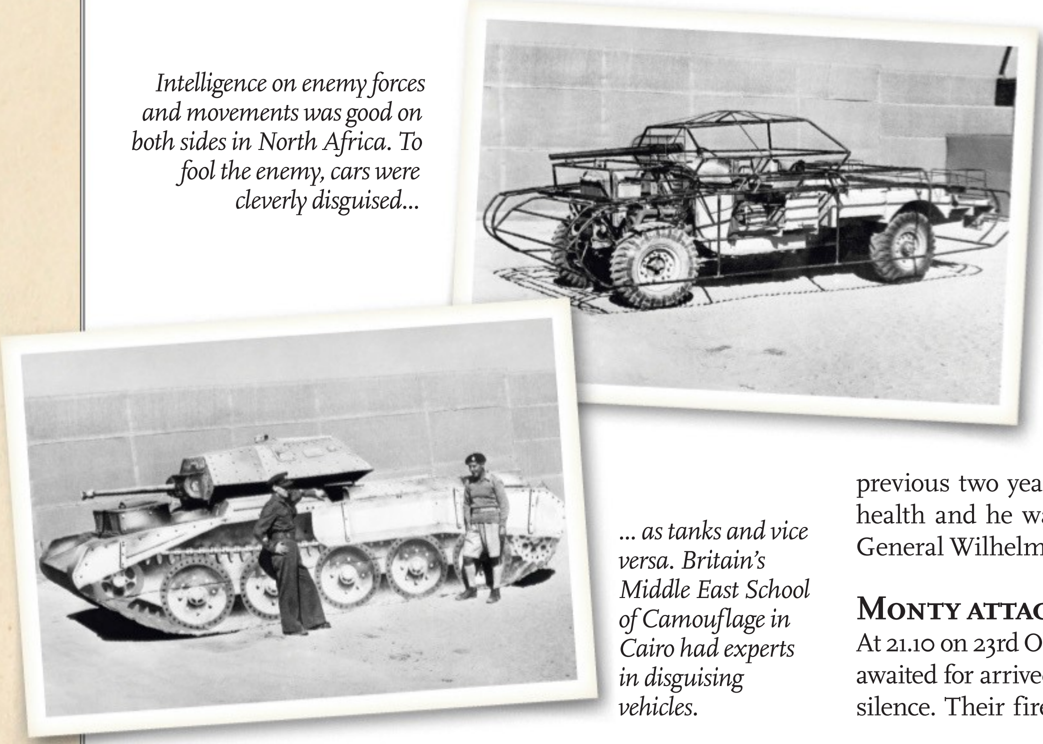
The war is being fought on two fronts. One is in the Soviet Union, where the Germans have reached Stalingrad and hope to push on to the oil fields in the Caucasus. The second is in Egypt, where a German victory will secure access to the oil in Arabia. Field Marshal Rommel is at el Alamein – just 240 km from Cairo.

The desert was completely quiet. The night sky was clear, and the soft moonlight coloured the cold, flat landscape a steel grey. A total of 328,000 troops and nearly 1,600 tanks covertly faced each other. Camouflaged and hidden in trenches on opposite sides of a front just 60 kilometres long, the two forces were separated by a wide minefield. No civilians or buildings stood in their way – it was army against army, drawn up like two parties before a duel. Everyone now waited nervously for the moment when the silence would be broken and a storm unleashed.

Germans had been successful so far

For two years, the Desert War had rippled back and forth. Hitler wanted to wrest control of Cairo from British hands and use the Nile Valley as a springboard to reach the great oil reserves in the Arabian Peninsula. Victory would also secure the Suez Canal in Egypt, the gateway to the Indian Ocean and eastern riches. The Führer's dream looked likely to become reality: German field marshal Erwin Rommel had reached El Alamein in Egypt – just 240 kilometres short of Cairo.

Rommel's campaign had begun in the Italian colony of Libya. The shrewd commander had led an under-strength force to a string of victories over the British in the desert, who quickly dubbed him the "Desert Fox". His advance towards Cairo was, however, so rapid that his supply chain couldn't keep up. Fuel, weapons and ammunition were shipped from Italy to Tripoli in Libya to be transported through the desert by truck. When Rommel reached El Alamein, his supply line was 2,000 kilometres long and extremely vulnerable. The columns of trucks were attacked by British fighters, while Italian cargo ships in the Mediterranean were sunk by Allied submarines and warships.



Intelligence on enemy forces and movements was good on both sides in North Africa. To fool the enemy, cars were cleverly disguised...

... as tanks and vice versa. Britain's Middle East School of Camouflage in Cairo had experts in disguising vehicles.

Rommel now had no choice but to halt his advance. He decided to entrench his army behind a wide minefield and ordered his infantry to dig in. The British must not be allowed to break through his lines.

Churchill sent the right man

Prime Minister Winston Churchill had until that point been under increasing pressure. Politicians and military personnel, both at home and abroad, doubted whether the British army could win a single battle. Now, he finally had an opportunity to give the Allies hope.

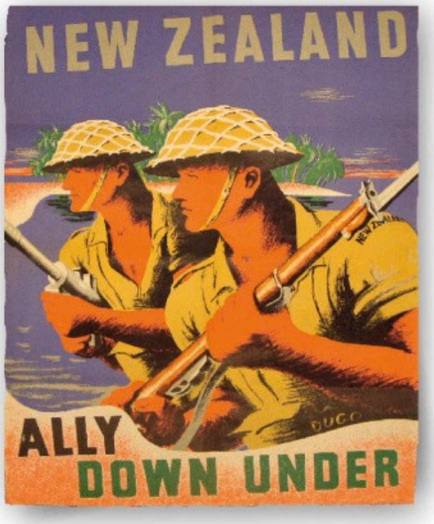
Up until that point, the Desert War had been fought on Rommel's terms. Churchill decided to send the unknown, but promising Major General Bernard "Monty" Montgomery to North Africa. He hoped that the general would supply the key to unlock the Desert Fox's defences.

Montgomery didn't hold with conventional thinking that tanks should advance ahead of the infantry. He planned to let his artillery destroy the enemy's gun emplacements before ordering the infantry to clear a path through Rommel's minefield. Finally, Montgomery's armoured forces would advance to fight face to face and send the enemy packing.

The British general was encouraged by Rommel's absence on the battlefield. The previous two years had taken their toll on the Desert Fox's health and he was on sick leave in Austria, leaving Major General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma in charge at El Alamein.

Monty attacked individual positions

At 21.10 on 23rd October, the moment the troops had nervously awaited for arrived. In an instant, 800 British guns broke the silence. Their fire lit up the darkness, and the thunder that



New Zealand soldiers participated in the Battle of El Alamein under Montgomery's command.

rolled across the night sky could be heard in Alexandria 120 kilometres to the east. Montgomery instructed the artillery to concentrate its fire on a specific part of the enemy line rather than letting their shells fall evenly everywhere. He compared it to using a powerful jet of water from a garden hose, rather than sprinkling water everywhere in gentle droplets.

The first shells pounded the German and Italian artillery positions. This initial bombardment lasted for 40 minutes and destroyed hundreds of enemy guns. On average, the Axis gun positions were subjected to 20 shells for each one they fired in return. German and Italian gunners died en masse, while others were deafened by the explosions and bled from their ears.

Next, the British guns were trained on the German-Italian infantry, which lay just the other side of the minefield. Trenches, barbed wire and minefields were destroyed. The bombardment of the front line lasted five minutes. Minesweepers from the Royal Engineers moved in – armed with mine-detectors – with the infantry hot on their heels. "The detector required even more courage, for the sapper had to stand upright, 'moving the detector arm backwards and forwards over the desert surface'", historian Ben Shephard explains. Plus, they had to do this while bullets whizzed around them and everyone was bent over or lying flat to avoid being hit.

When a mine was detected, a soldier would squat down and probe the spot diagonally with his bayonet. Once the tip touched the mine, it was dug up and carefully disarmed.

While the soldiers painstakingly worked their way through the minefield, bullets and shells whipped over the battlefield from German tanks and machine gun nests. Soldiers fell screaming in the sand while their comrades continued forward.

Thousands of men and hundreds of tanks slowly advanced in the dark through the mine-swept corridors. The infantry wore storm lamps on their backs, so that while the soldiers behind them could find their way, the light remained invisible to the enemy ahead of them. Others laid long white strips of cloth behind them to mark the attack corridors that initially measured 15 metres in width. Soon, the first

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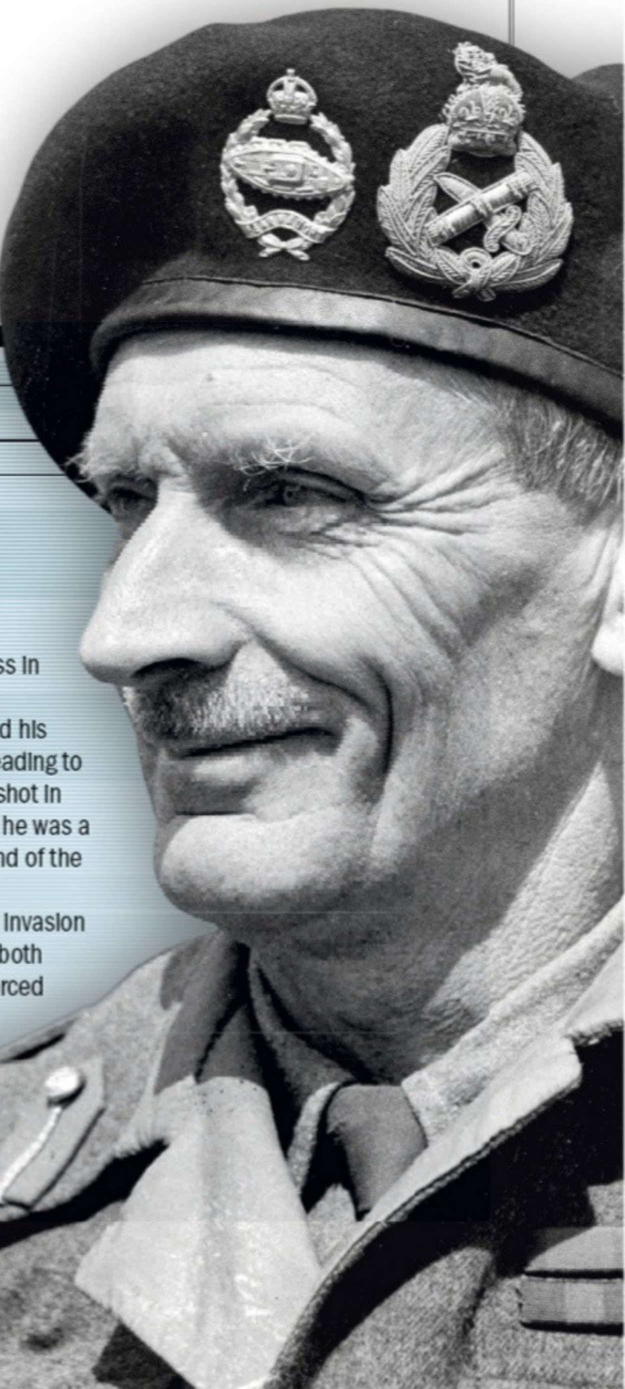


Montgomery was a notorious braggart, a characteristic that put him at odds with Churchill.

1887-1976

NAME **BERNARD MONTGOMERY**

TITLE MAJOR GENERAL

Desert rat was Eisenhower's rival

General Bernard Law Montgomery was Winston Churchill's trump card. After his success in North Africa, however, he vied with the Eisenhower for power.

Montgomery was born the son of a bishop in London in 1887. In 1908, he completed his training at Sandhurst Military Academy, then served for several years in India before heading to the trenches in France. In October 1914, Montgomery was badly wounded after being shot in the chest. Two years later, he returned to the Western Front, and by the end of the war, he was a chief of staff. In 1938, Montgomery was promoted to major general and given command of the British forces in Palestine. In July 1942, he was ordered to lead the 8th Army in Libya.

In December 1943, Montgomery took command of all British troops for the planned invasion of mainland Europe. But it was not enough: the ambitious officer wanted to command both British and US troops. The US wanted its own man – Eisenhower – and Churchill was forced to accept. Montgomery questioned his rival's competency and was about to be fired, when Churchill intervened, promoting him to field marshal and appointing him commander of all British occupation forces in Europe.

- **Was known for his lack of tact and diplomacy.**
- **Accused Eisenhower of poor leadership during the war.**

problems arose as confusion caused congestion in the narrow corridors. Some tanks had to halt and wait for mines to be cleared; others took a wrong turn and ended up in the minefields, while entire units of soldiers lost their bearings and got lost in a darkness made more impenetrable by the sand whipped up by tanks' tracks.

GERMANS WERE FOOLED

Montgomery's plan was to break through the northern part of the German minefield and then send most of his strength

Despite having great insight, Rommel couldn't figure out where the Allied forces would try to break through his defensive lines.

The British 8th Armoured Brigade helped to turn the war in North Africa. The red fox was its emblem.

through the breach. He began by launching a feint attack on the German armoured forces in the south, near the Qattara Depression, while Australian troops made a second feint along the Mediterranean coast.

The misdirection worked. The Germans and Italians didn't yet know where the real attack would come, and they were forced to send forces north and south. At the same time, the British continued their painstaking work in the minefield.

By dawn on 24th October, a few British divisions had advanced through the minefield and reached the enemy's forward positions. Only a few were able to occupy the trenches, however, and most of the British had to dig fresh trenches in the sand to avoid becoming sitting ducks at sunrise.

Advance continued in the daylight

Behind the British vanguard, chaos still reigned in the corridors through the minefield. The slow advance continued into the morning with clouds of dust from

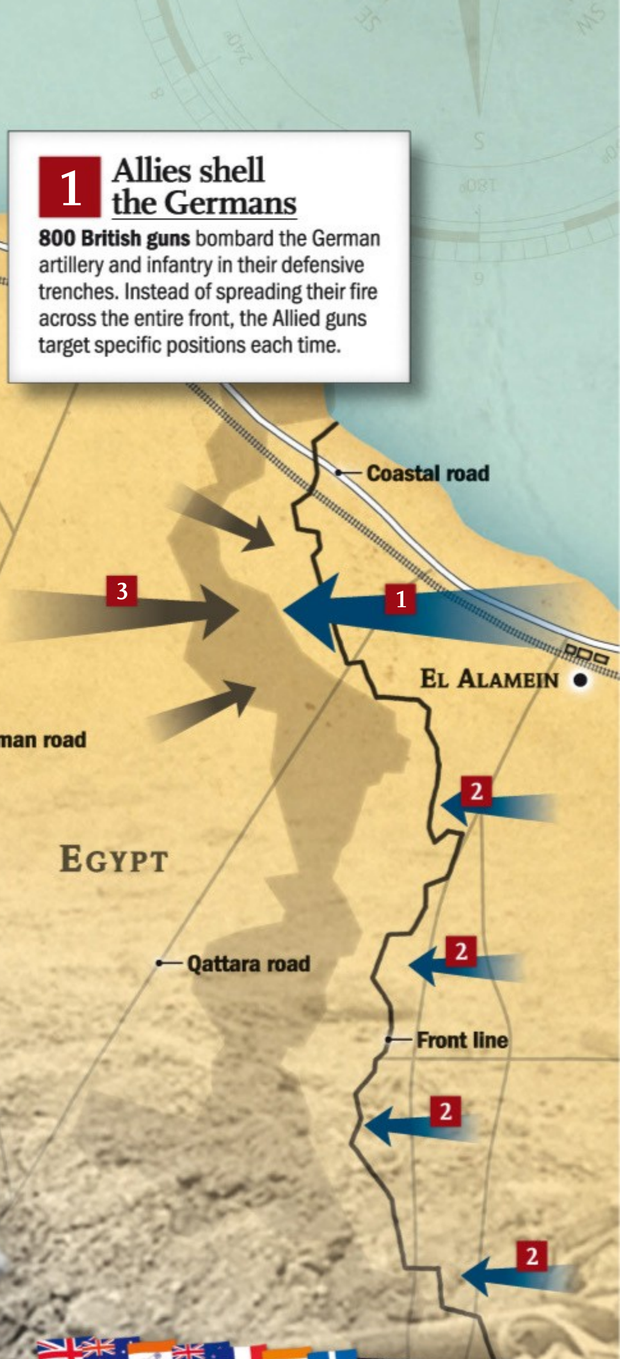
Rommel needed new tactics

Rommel's stock in trade was to make surprise attacks on his enemy flanks, but the landscape at El Alamein prevented such a tactic. Instead, Rommel chose to dig in and lay a wide minefield in front of his troops.

23RD OCTOBER

Allies were more numerous

445,000 German mines lay between Rommel's and Montgomery's armies. The Allies had more artillery support than any European force before, plus almost three times as many tanks as the Germans and Italians combined and almost twice as many men. Montgomery definitely had the best hand.



1 Allies shell the Germans

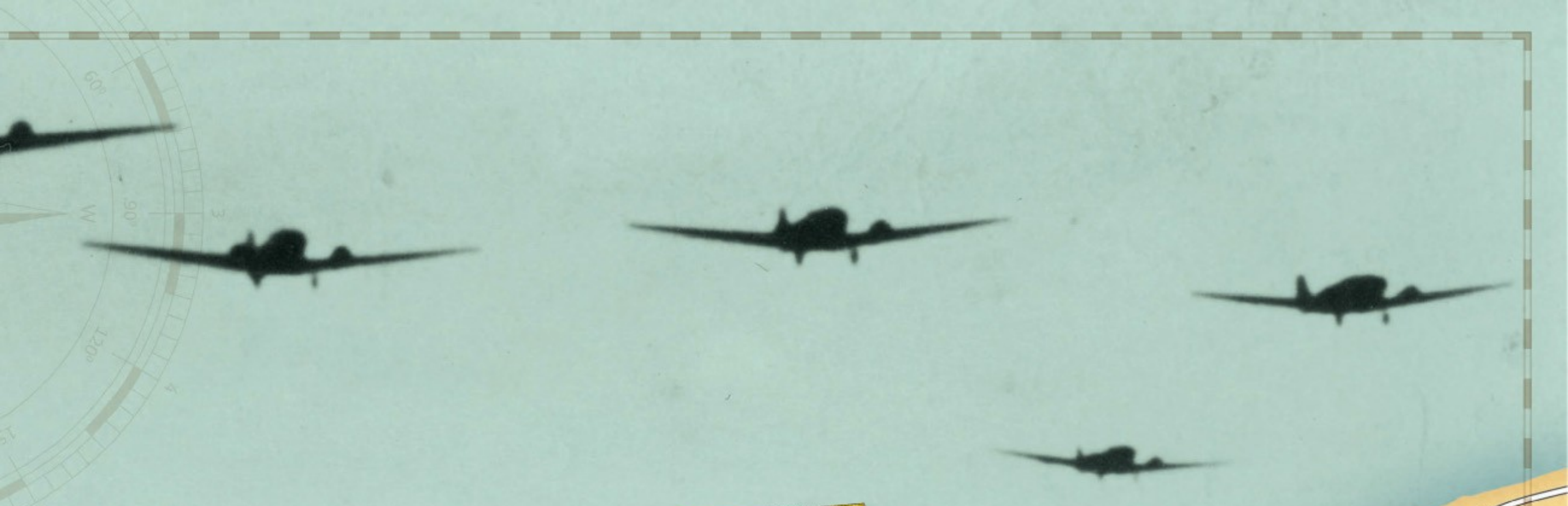
800 British guns bombard the German artillery and infantry in their defensive trenches. Instead of spreading their fire across the entire front, the Allied guns target specific positions each time.

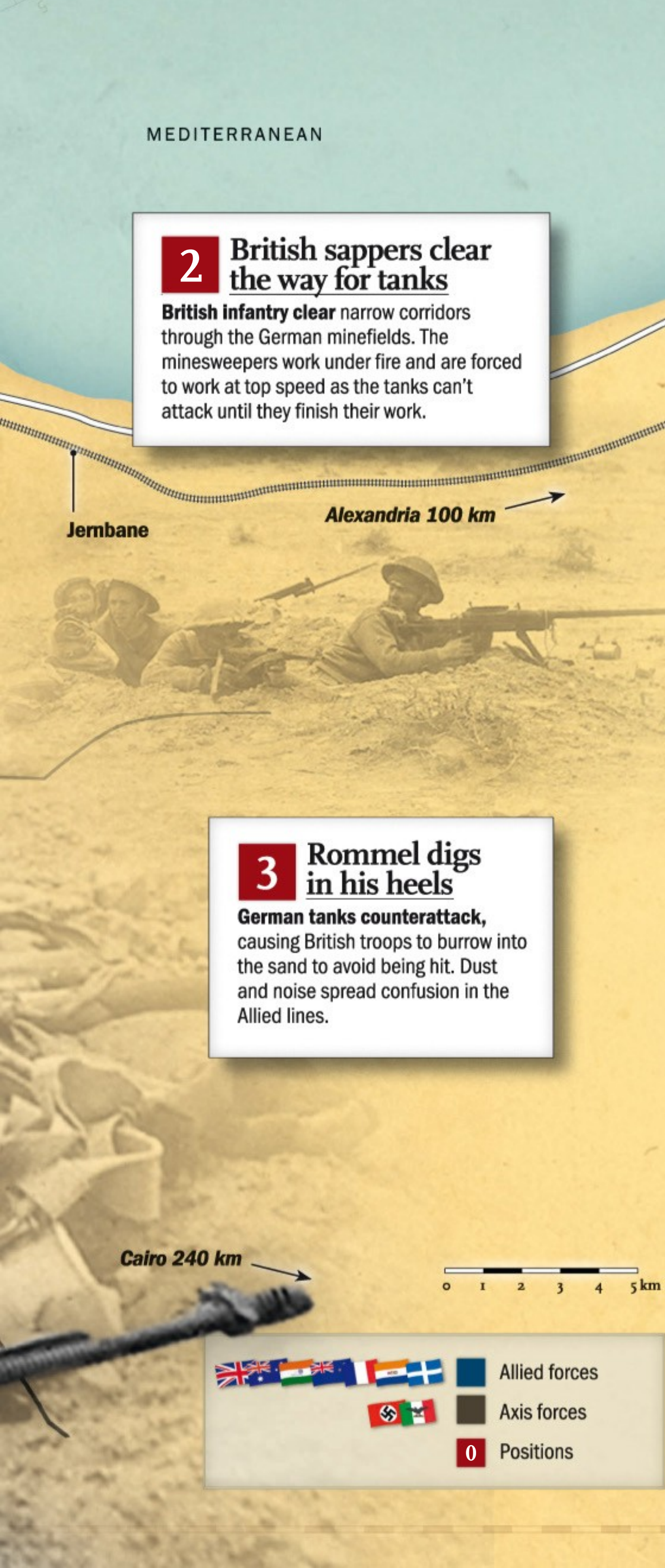
MONTGOMERY'S 8TH ARMY

INFANTRY:	220,000
TANKS:	1,029
ANTI-TANK GUNS:	1,401
ARTILLERY GUNS:	900
PLANES:	530

ROMMEL'S AFRIKA CORPS

INFANTRY:	116,000
TANKS:	547
ANTI-TANK GUNS:	496
ARTILLERY GUNS:	0
PLANES:	350




MEDITERRANEAN
Jernbane
Alexandria 100 km
Cairo 240 km
0 1 2 3 4 5 km
Allied forces
Axis forces
0 Positions

2 British sappers clear the way for tanks

British infantry clear narrow corridors through the German minefields. The minesweepers work under fire and are forced to work at top speed as the tanks can't attack until they finish their work.

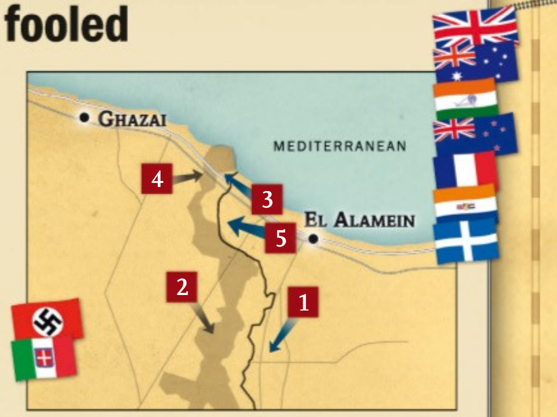
3 Rommel digs in his heels

German tanks counterattack, causing British troops to burrow into the sand to avoid being hit. Dust and noise spread confusion in the Allied lines.

24TH OCTOBER

Germans were fooled

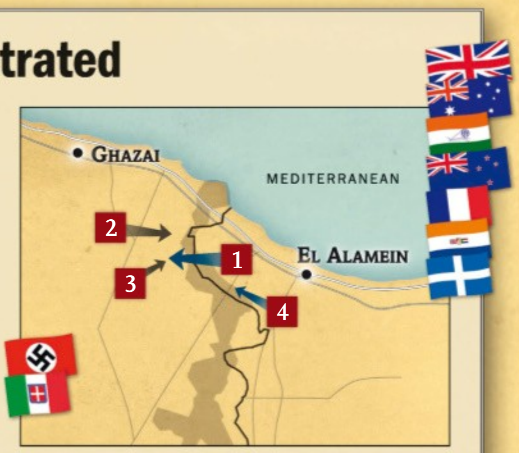
After a night spent **heavy bombing** German positions, the army moves forward. 1 Montgomery makes a feint to the south. 2 The Germans follow. 3 Australians deploy another feint at the coast. 4 The Germans divert troops to counter. 5 Montgomery attacks in the north, but can't break through.


GHAZAI
MEDITERRANEAN
EL ALAMEIN
1
2
3
4
5

26TH OCTOBER

Minefield penetrated

Despite holes forming in the German-Italian line, the Allied victory is not yet won. 1 Allied tanks and infantry break through the minefield. 2 German anti-tank guns cause problems for the Allies. 3 German tanks help prevent Allied victory. 4 Allied reinforcements arrive.


GHAZAI
MEDITERRANEAN
EL ALAMEIN
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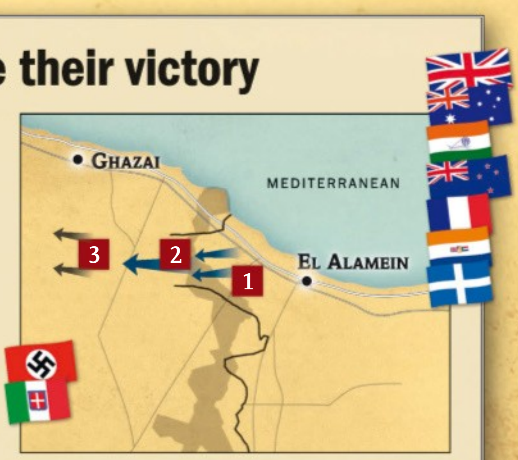
2ND NOVEMBER

Allies complete their victory

It's third time lucky for the Allied forces. 1 Twice Montgomery fails in his attempts at a frontal assault on the German defences. 2 The third time he breaks through. 3 Rommel has to face facts and admit the battle is lost. He issues orders for a full German withdrawal.


GHAZAI
MEDITERRANEAN
EL ALAMEIN
1
2
3

British war photographer Len Chetwyn set fire to a mobile field kitchen to create smoke for these staged war scenes.

British photographers faked war photos

War correspondents were often hit by enemy fire in North Africa, so they resorted to staging scenes away from the dangers of the front.

The front in North Africa was the only one that the British fought on from 1940-42. It was therefore heavily covered, particularly in British and Australian newspapers. Journalists and photographers flocked to the desert, but in their quest for the best stories and images, many journalists were caught by German bullets or artillery fire. British photographer Len Chetwyn and others therefore decided to start staging suitable scenes behind the line, where they could work in relative safety. Fleet Street liked the evocative "photojournalism" style and used the images extensively in their papers.

tanks and explosions reducing visibility. The deafening roar of engines, shells and machine guns made it impossible for the troops to hear one another and, once again, Allied soldiers and tank drivers became disoriented.

Despite the confusion, however, there was no doubt that the battle was only going one way – the Germans were being pushed backed by the Allies. Hitler received reports that his army in North Africa was being forced back. In a last desperate act, the Führer ordered the still-ailing Desert Fox to fly back to the desert, via Italy and Crete. Rommel arrived on the battlefield during the evening of 25th October, but he was quickly forced to concede there was little hope of saving the situation.

No prisoners

On 26th October, British tanks attacked Italian trenches deep behind the minefield. Several British units had received orders not to take prisoners. They must not waste time: the offensive couldn't afford to be delayed.

"The first trenches we came to were packed with Eyeties. We made short work of them, ran alongside their trenches and dropped in grenades, shouting: 'Eggs for breakfast, you bastards'. Then we went back, with one track on the edge, and gave them a quick burial", a member of a British tank crew later recalled.

Rommel now realised how the British aimed to break through his defences. German and Italian tanks counterattacked around the strategically important Kidney Ridge, where fighting flowed back and forth. When the day was over, however, it was the Italians' tank strength that had been decimated – from 41 tanks to just two.

Tank crews burned

Often tank crews burned to death because their exits were either jammed or blocked by sand. The soldiers outside could hear them screaming. Many cried for their mothers.

Italian Captain Dino Contini recalled: "Some of the tanks continued to advance even after they had been hit and set on fire, with only dead or dying men inside them, like huge self-propelled funeral pyres, a dead man's foot still pressing down on the accelerator."

Slowly the British pushed deeper and deeper into the Axis defensive line. On the evening of 28th October, Rommel wrote a letter to his wife, Lucia:

"Very heavy fighting! No one can imagine the fear hanging over me. Once again, everything is at stake. The circumstances we are in could not be worse. I am still hoping we can pull through."

Major breakthrough cost dearly

Rommel was running out of supplies. Any tank, artillery, man or barrel of oil lost was one that couldn't be replaced. The Desert Fox's army grew weaker by the hour.

At 11.00 on 2nd November, Montgomery finally delivered his coup de grace. A total of 94 British tanks and 400 infantrymen fought their way through the defensive line, but the success cost them dearly. Only 19 tanks and 170 exhausted men managed to reach the top of the Tel el Aqqaqir ridge from where they could report news of Rommel's movements.

Rommel sent 60 tanks to try to plug the gap, but the small group of soldiers were supported by British artillery and aircraft. By sunset, the Germans had just 30 tanks left.

The field marshal had lost any chance of victory. Again, he wrote to his wife:

"Hard days lie ahead... The dead are the lucky ones, for them it is all over... Our fate is in God's hand. Farewell to you and our lad."

The German commander realised that the entire Allied force would soon surge through the gap in his defensive line like water through a broken dam. Rommel chose to save what remained of his army and ordered a general retreat. Tens of thousands of Germans and Italians fled to the city of Fuka, 100 kilometres west of El Alamein. During their retreat, the Germans destroyed the only thing they hadn't run out of. The fire and smoke from more than 12,000 tonnes of ammunition made the barren desert appear apocalyptic.

Instead of destroying Rommel's army, Montgomery followed carefully. He dared not risk losing the hard-earned and vital victory with another head-on battle with Rommel, who over the previous two years had repeatedly shown himself shrewd enough to outflank the British.

The 7th Armoured Division had a jerboa, a fast-moving 'desert rat', as its emblem.

Over the following year, Rommel was constantly in retreat. The final German-Italian forces in North Africa were finished off in a desperate battle with the British in Tunisia. 140,000 Italians and 100,000 Germans surrendered on 13th May, 1943. By that time, Rommel had already flown back to Europe. Hitler had given the field marshal a new task: fortifying mainland Europe against an expected invasion.

The British never captured the Desert Fox, but the German-Italian adventure in North Africa was over. The Third Reich would never again come close to capturing the oil reserves in the Arabian Peninsula.

Churchill wrote in his memoirs:

"It might almost be said: 'Before Alamein we never had a victory, after Alamein we never had a defeat.'"

PERSPECTIVE

Rommel built Nazi Europe's Atlantic Wall

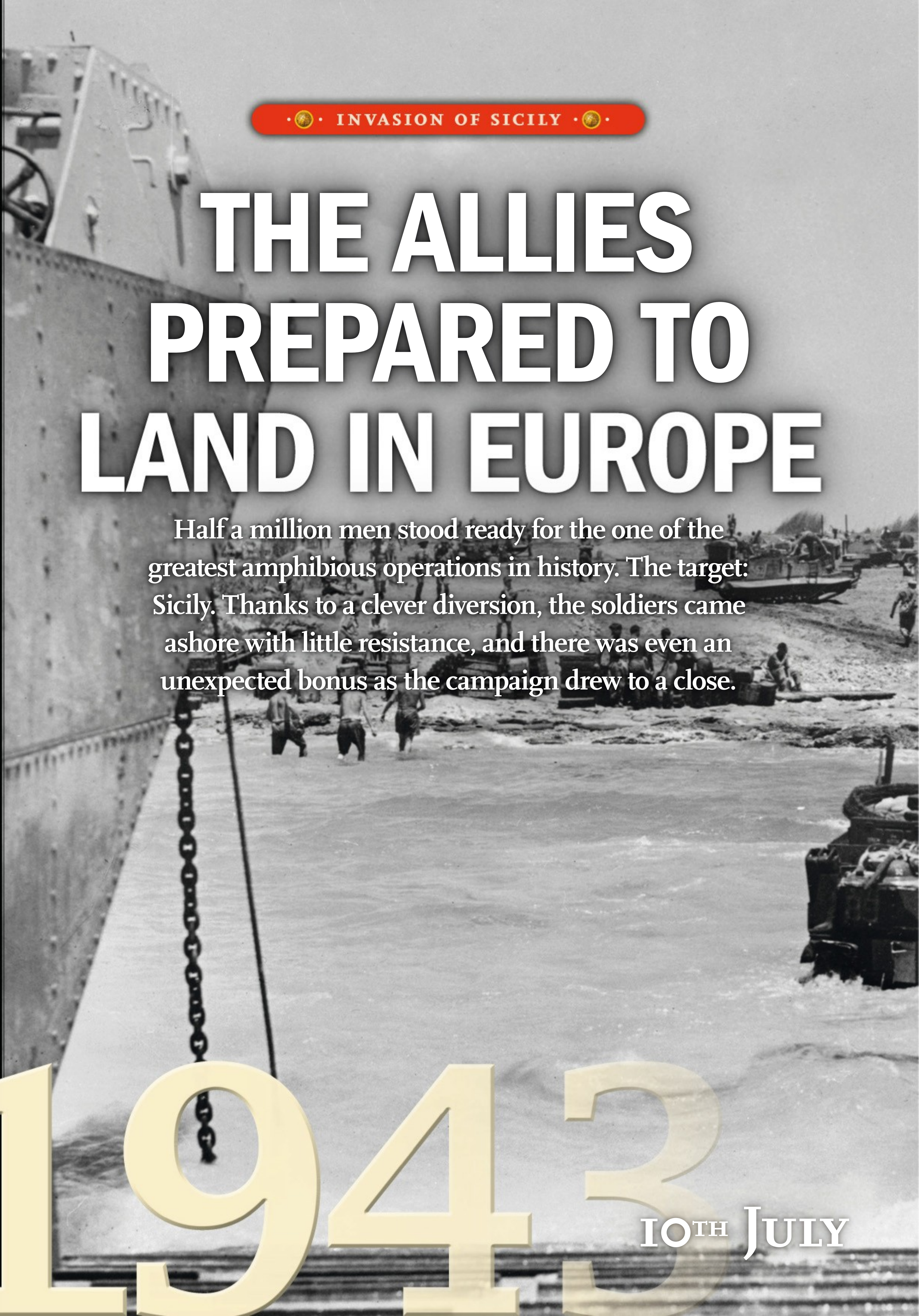
After the withdrawal from Egypt, Rommel focussed on fortifying mainland Europe's west coast defences against an expected invasion.

In November 1943 – after the German and Italian forces were defeated and forced to retreat from El Alamein – Field Marshal Erwin Rommel took command of the Atlantic Wall construction project, Hitler's grand fortification plan to secure the continent's western coast. Rommel's job was to make the defences ready for the expected Allied invasion.

It wasn't a new project. Hitler had started work on his 'west wall' to protect German-occupied Europe earlier in the war, but the pace of work had slackened dramatically in mid-1943 when fierce fighting on the Eastern Front began to tie up German men and resources.

Rommel plugged the gaps he found in the Atlantic Wall, adding thousands of new bunkers, guns, mines, and anti-tank barriers.

The Desert Fox, Rommel, (right) reviews the Atlantic Coast fortifications. He later ordered thousands of improvements.



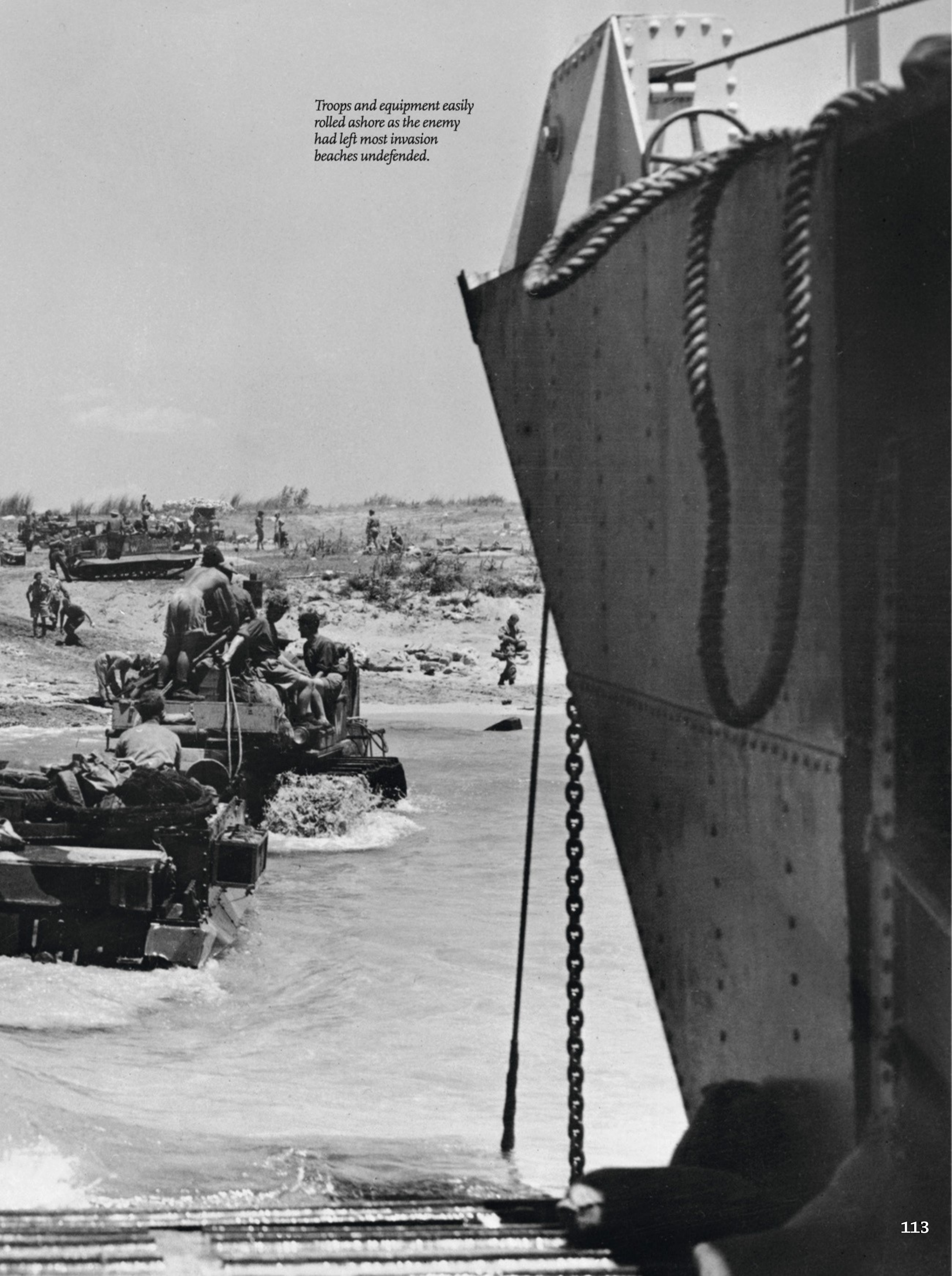
INVASION OF SICILY

THE ALLIES PREPARED TO LAND IN EUROPE

Half a million men stood ready for the one of the greatest amphibious operations in history. The target: Sicily. Thanks to a clever diversion, the soldiers came ashore with little resistance, and there was even an unexpected bonus as the campaign drew to a close.

1943

10TH JULY



Troops and equipment easily rolled ashore as the enemy had left most invasion beaches undefended.

Sicily 1943

THE STAGE IS SET

Italy
Sicily

The war in North Africa has been won by the Allies, but shipping in the Mediterranean is still under attack from Italian and German bases in Sicily. Britain and the US decide to capture the island to end the attacks and destabilise Italy's fascist regime. Preparations begin to land the largest number of troops in history.

It was 04.30 on the morning of 10th July 1943. Day had yet to break as Bill Cheall crawled down the scrambling net that clung to his ship's side. Thousands of small landing craft awaited the troops, bobbing up and down like corks, but despite the heavy swell caused by strong winds, Cheall was able to board successfully – just: "It was a strange sensation to go to put our foot on something solid and finding it wasn't solid at all, but almost alive," he later recounted.

The 26-year-old British soldier had seen a lot since he'd signed up for the army in 1939. In just four years, Cheall had faced Hitler's forces in both France and Africa, but this was nothing like anything he'd experienced before. As the day dawned, Cheall's boat cut its way towards the coast. Operation Husky, the Allied landing on Sicily, was underway.

The landing was the biggest of the war so far and would be the first time that the Allies had attempted to invade mainland Europe. Commanders were optimistic of success because the Axis forces were on the defensive, having been forced out of North Africa a few months previously. Sicily was the obvious first target of a campaign planning to inflict a final defeat on Hitler's Nazi forces. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had dubbed Sicily Europe's "soft underbelly", believing it a good place to launch the Allies' advance into Europe.

Landfall met almost no resistance

The invasion plan, devised by General Dwight D Eisenhower, was simple. British, Canadian and US forces would make a landing across a wide front on the south-eastern coast of the

1890-1969

NAME **DWIGHT D EISENHOWER**

TITLE FIVE-STAR GENERAL

Ike was a late bloomer in the US Army

Although Eisenhower – or Ike, as he'd been called since childhood – ranked third best in his class when he graduated from the prestigious West Point military academy in 1915, the army didn't need him in an active role. While his comrades were sent to Europe to fight in World War I, Ike had to settle for commanding a training camp situated on a battlefield from the Civil War era.

Despite his lack of combat experience, Eisenhower demonstrated fine organisational skills, and gradually worked his way up through the ranks during the interwar period. In 1942, he was put at the head of US forces in Europe and led the campaigns in Africa, Sicily and Italy, as well as being responsible for D-Day.

Originally, Eisenhower had no desire to enter politics but was persuaded by the Republicans and became US president from 1953-1961. After World War II, he ended the Korean War and repeatedly expressed the importance of securing peace by all available means.

- **Raised in the US Midwest with a strong religious background.**
- **Was a keen golf, poker and bridge player.**

island. From here, the British, under the direction of General Bernard 'Monty' Montgomery, would advance north, capturing ports and airfields to facilitate more troop landings. Their ultimate aim was to take the port city of Messina that provided the primary connection to the Italian mainland. Meanwhile the less-experienced US Seventh Army, under the command of Lieutenant General George Patton, was tasked with taking a route further west to protect the British flanks.

The landings were originally supposed to be supported by paratroopers, but the strong winds blew both parachutes and gliders off course. Yet the difficult weather also had its advantages. Both German and Italian commanders decided it was impossible for the Allies to attempt an invasion in such conditions, so the defence forces weren't on a state of alert. It meant the initial invasion force of around 150,000 men and 600 tanks landed in relatively peaceful conditions.

"Everybody was surprised at the lack of opposition... Consequently, we were soon established on dry land, but with very wet legs," Cheall recalled.

Only the central portion of the US invasion force experienced resistance from German armoured forces, even before they'd reached the beach. But when the Allied ships' guns began to thunder, German opposition quickly fell away.

Jack Wallace, a Canadian whose regiments fought under Montgomery, recounted in his diary that when he advanced in the afternoon with his armoured platoon towards a small town, the landscape was scoured for opposition. "We advanced steadily – 200, 300, 500, 800 yards, but there was no sign of the enemy," he wrote. "We approached the objective ready for all hell to break loose until we saw a tiny white flag at the first house. Inside it we found four very poor Sicilian peasants."

The lack of resistance wasn't simply a result of the weather. The Axis powers had a relatively weak presence in Sicily, in part due to the Germans being tricked a few months previously by an ingenious piece of British Intelligence misinformation. Operation Mincemeat had seen the Germans 'discover' a body dressed in military uniform carrying a folder of fake invasion plans. According to the plans, Greece and Sardinia were the main target for the forthcoming invasion, and Hitler had moved troops from Sicily to counter the perceived threat.

Soldiers carry their firearms carefully through the surf to avoid getting them wet.

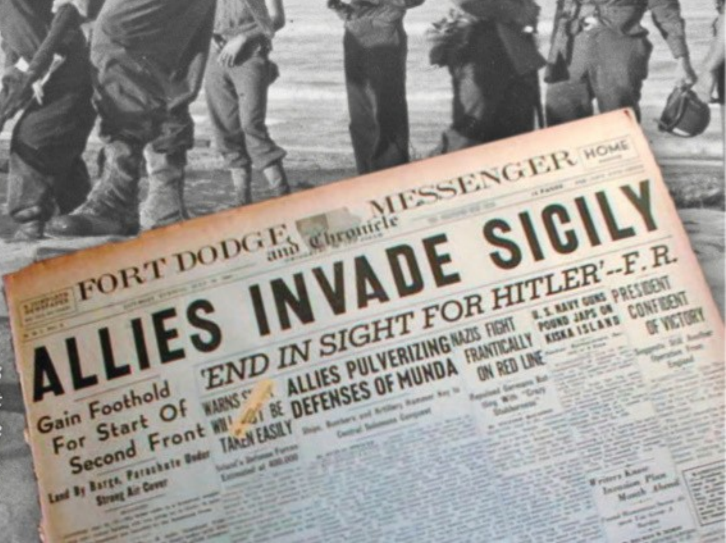
Crucial port was captured

By the end of the invasion's first day, George Patton's Seventh Army had established a beachhead 80 kilometres wide and 3-6 km deep. Along the way, his troops had taken 4,000 prisoners with virtually no losses.

This lack of resistance continued even after the Allies began to march north. Bill Cheall recalled how "the civilians appeared to welcome us, handing us fruit" from the oranges and lemons grown on their farms.

On 12th July, British forces took the port of Augusta on the east coast before heading north. Meanwhile, Patton moved the Seventh Army north-west towards Palermo on the north coast. The Americans advanced swiftly and seized the important port on 22nd July. Once it was occupied, the Allies could land more troops and supplies. While US

US soldiers used their rifle bayonets to prod the sand cautiously for land mines.



FORT DODGE and Chronicle MESSENGER HOME

ALLIES INVADE SICILY

'END IN SIGHT FOR HITLER'--F. R.

Gain Foothold For Start Of Second Front

Land By Barge, Parachute Under Strong Air Cover

WARNS [illegible] WILL [illegible] BE TAKEN EASILY

ALLIES PULVERIZING DEFENSES OF MUNDA

NAZIS FIGHT FRANTICALLY ON RED LINE

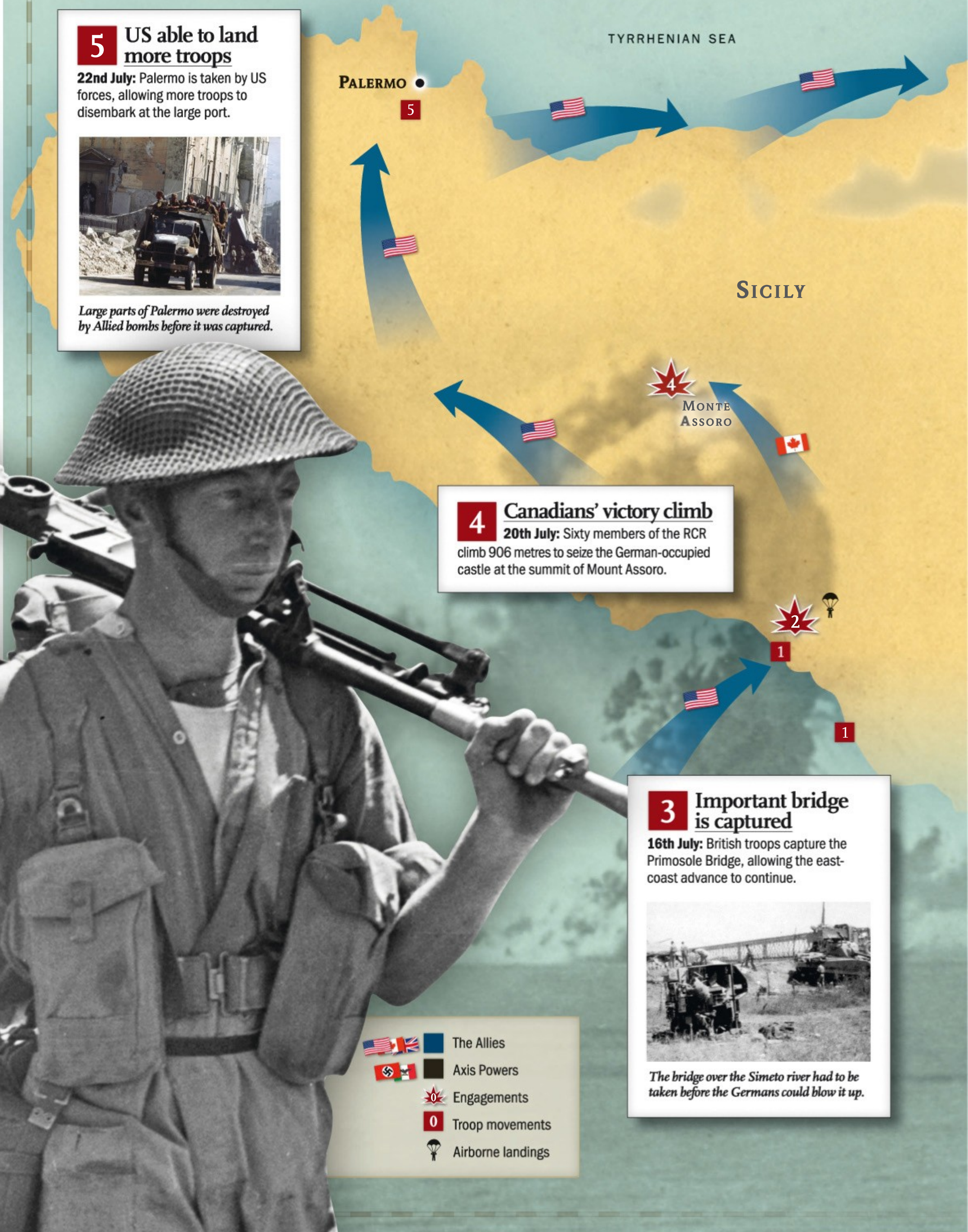
U. S. NAVY GUNS POUND JAPS ON KISKA ISLAND

PRESIDENT CONFIDENT OF VICTORY

News of the first landings in Sicily led to prominent headlines throughout the free world.

How Sicily was overrun

The invasion of Sicily followed a broad plan whereby US forces took the western part of the island, while British soldiers advanced along the east coast.


TYRRHENIAN SEA
PALERMO
5
SICILY
4
MONTE ASSORO
2
1
1
The Allies
Axis Powers
Engagements
Troop movements
Airborne landings

5 US able to land more troops

22nd July: Palermo is taken by US forces, allowing more troops to disembark at the large port.

Large parts of Palermo were destroyed by Allied bombs before it was captured.

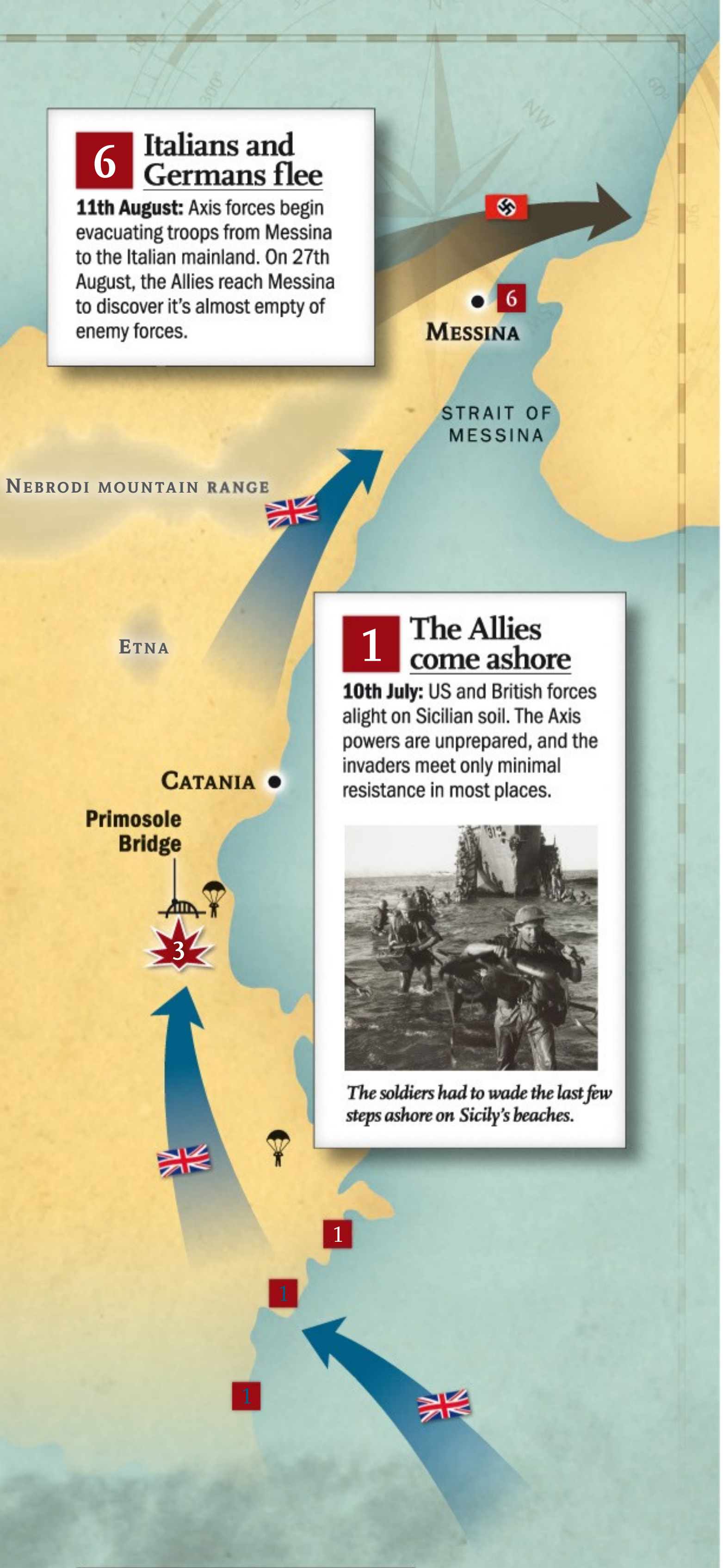
4 Canadians' victory climb

20th July: Sixty members of the RCR climb 906 metres to seize the German-occupied castle at the summit of Mount Assoro.

3 Important bridge is captured

16th July: British troops capture the Primosole Bridge, allowing the east-coast advance to continue.

The bridge over the Simeto river had to be taken before the Germans could blow it up.



6 Italians and Germans flee

11th August: Axis forces begin evacuating troops from Messina to the Italian mainland. On 27th August, the Allies reach Messina to discover it's almost empty of enemy forces.

1 The Allies come ashore

10th July: US and British forces alight on Sicilian soil. The Axis powers are unprepared, and the invaders meet only minimal resistance in most places.

The soldiers had to wade the last few steps ashore on Sicily's beaches.

2 Defenders try counterattack

11th July: US forces encounter dogged resistance in the Piano Lupo Valley. The Seventh Army loses 2,300 men – the Allies' biggest loss of the entire campaign.

Badges for the US Seventh Army and British Eighth Army, both of which were created during the war.

forces enjoyed a surprisingly easy passage, the British eventually encountered serious resistance, not least at the Primosole Bridge, an important crossing over the Simeto river. According to the original plan, it should have been taken by troops from the 1st Parachute Brigade. The intention had been to land soldiers on both sides of the bridge, then hold it until the British Eighth Army arrived. Unfortunately, the aircraft delivering the paratroopers came under heavy fire from the Luftwaffe, and its evasive manoeuvres led to the paratroopers being scattered over a large area.

Cheall, who approached the bridge on 13th July, watched the fighting from a nearby high vantage point.

"At this stage, our 69th Brigade was in a position on the hillsides overlooking Primosole Bridge, although we were actually some distance away looking across the valley through which the river ran," he wrote. "Although not taking part in the actual attack, our battalion was being machine-gunned, shelled and mortared, causing many casualties amongst us."

The bridge wasn't secured until 16th July, allowing Cheall and other Eighth Army soldiers to continue their march north. Only after crossing the bridge did he see how bloody the battle had been: "The whole area around the bridge was littered with dead bodies and all kinds of weapons and equipment."

GERMANS FORTIFIED AN OLD CASTLE

It wasn't just the Germans who made life miserable for the Allies. Sicily's mountainous terrain posed most problems for the Royal Canadian Regiment. Its road to Messina passed over Monte Assoro. At its summit, 906 metres high, lay an old castle that the Germans had fortified and could use to fire on the advancing soldiers. The Canadians would have to take the fortress and destroy the German artillery.

On the west side of the mountain, the village of Assoro clung to the cliff side. The only route through was a road that twisted between the houses and up the mountain. But the Canadians knew that awaiting them would be numerous machine-gun nests. Their only chance of taking the mountain would be to approach from the south side. Here, however, there was only a small path, created over »

DEFENSIVE FORCES

TROOPS:	German: 30,000 Italian: 230,000 ■ Germans reinforced their numbers to around 60,000 during the campaign, including an additional parachute division.
LOSSES:*	German: 29,000 Italian: 140,000 (of which 137,000 were captured)
TANKS:	260

INVASION FORCES

TROOPS:	150,000 ■ *During the invasion, the Allies reached a strength of 467,000 men.*
LOSSES:*	British/Canadian: 11,800 US: 8,800
TANKS:	600

**Dead, wounded or captured*

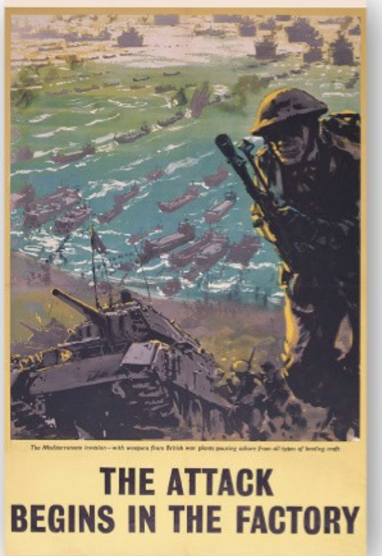
time by goatherds as they'd driven their flocks up and down the mountain.

To evade discovery, the Canadians were forced to advance at night to avoid becoming easy targets for the Germans at the top of the mountain.

The ascent began at 21.30 on 20th July. As silently as possible, 60 men – divided into three companies – started their climb to the top, carrying just weapons, ammunition and canteens of water.

The path was steep and overgrown, so the soldiers only reached the final part of the climb at 04.00. Several centuries earlier, 40 steps had been carved into the cliff, but they had almost worn away and provided little foothold. Cautiously, one by one, the soldiers had to climb the steps while clinging on to bushes and rocky outcrops with their hands. Guns and ammunition had to be passed up to the man in front after he'd climbed. Had a single man fallen, dropped his rifle or even sneezed, it would have been enough to alert the Germans, who could have easily shot the attackers who had no means to hide or flee.

Shortly before dawn, the Canadians reached the top, where they surprised three startled guards. The Germans hadn't even considered the possibility of the Allies ascending from the southern side of the fortress and had only watched the road leading from the village. The Canadians easily overwhelmed the guards and stormed the fortress. By evening, the castle was in Allied hands and the way forward was free.


The Mediterranean invasion—with weapons from British war plants pouring ashore from all types of landing craft
THE ATTACK
BEGINS IN THE FACTORY

The successful campaign was immediately exploited on Allied propaganda posters.

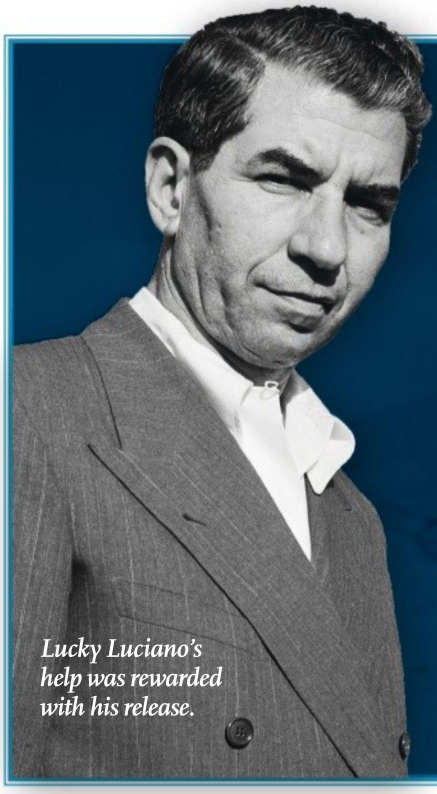
GERMAN DEFENCE COLLAPSED

The advance through Sicily produced a welcome bonus for the Allies when, by the end of July, Italy's fascist regime began to disintegrate. On 24th July, dictator Benito Mussolini resigned, and a new government immediately began negotiations for a ceasefire. At the same time, the Italian army began to withdraw its troops to the mainland. Hitler also gave notice to his generals to plan a withdrawal, but the Führer would not give up so easily, and ordered his troops to fight on while the plans were drawn up. For the rest of the month, the Allies engaged in several skirmishes with German forces, but as the days passed, the Allied forces slowly but surely forced the enemy back to Messina in the north-eastern corner of the island.

The withdrawal sped up when Patton and Montgomery reached the outskirts of Messina – the Germans and Italians managed to evacuate over 100,000 men in addition to large numbers of supplies and ammunition, plus many vehicles across the narrow Strait of Messina. When Patton drove into Messina on 17th August, he was surprised to find no sign of enemy troops. The battle for Sicily had been won, but the Germans had not suffered many losses, and much of their strength remained to defend the mainland.

When the liberation of Sicily was completed, Bill Cheall and his comrades from the 50th Division were billeted in Letojanni, a small seaside town a few kilometres from Messina. Here, the soldiers had the opportunity to both swim and rest. But after a few days, Cheall was sent orders by car to prepare lunch for special guests. When he wrote down his memories many years later, the soldier had forgotten what meal he served – but he never forgot who his lunch guests were: Montgomery and Eisenhower.

The Allies were given an enthusiastic welcome by the island's populace.



Lucky Luciano's help was rewarded with his release.

Mafia paved the way for invasion

Mob bosses hated Mussolini and gladly provided the Allies with intelligence about Sicily, which they knew so well.

As dictator, Mussolini could not accept that any part of the state was beyond his control. Il Duce therefore targeted the Mafia on his ascension to power in 1922. His persecution was so effective that many Mafiosi fled to the United States in 1926-27.

Evidence suggests that US authorities approached Mafia bosses in the United States to obtain their contacts in the old country to help the Allies in connection with the invasion of Sicily. It's believed that the Sicilian Mafia helped to turn public opinion in favour of the US and Allies, as well as contributing crucial intelligence about German and Italian troop movements.

After the war, the top Mafioso Lucky Luciano was released from a New York prison, allegedly in return for his help.

Mussolini was deposed after the invasion

Italian authorities imprisoned the dictator, but Hitler couldn't do without an ally and put his best commando on the case.

Fascist symbols fell out of favour after Mussolini's fall from power in 1943.

In 1943, Italy had been weakened. The country had suffered defeat in both North Africa and on the Eastern Front, and its lack of raw materials – particularly oil and coal – nearly brought industry to a standstill. Italians also lacked food, while at the same time, the presence of German troops was provocative.

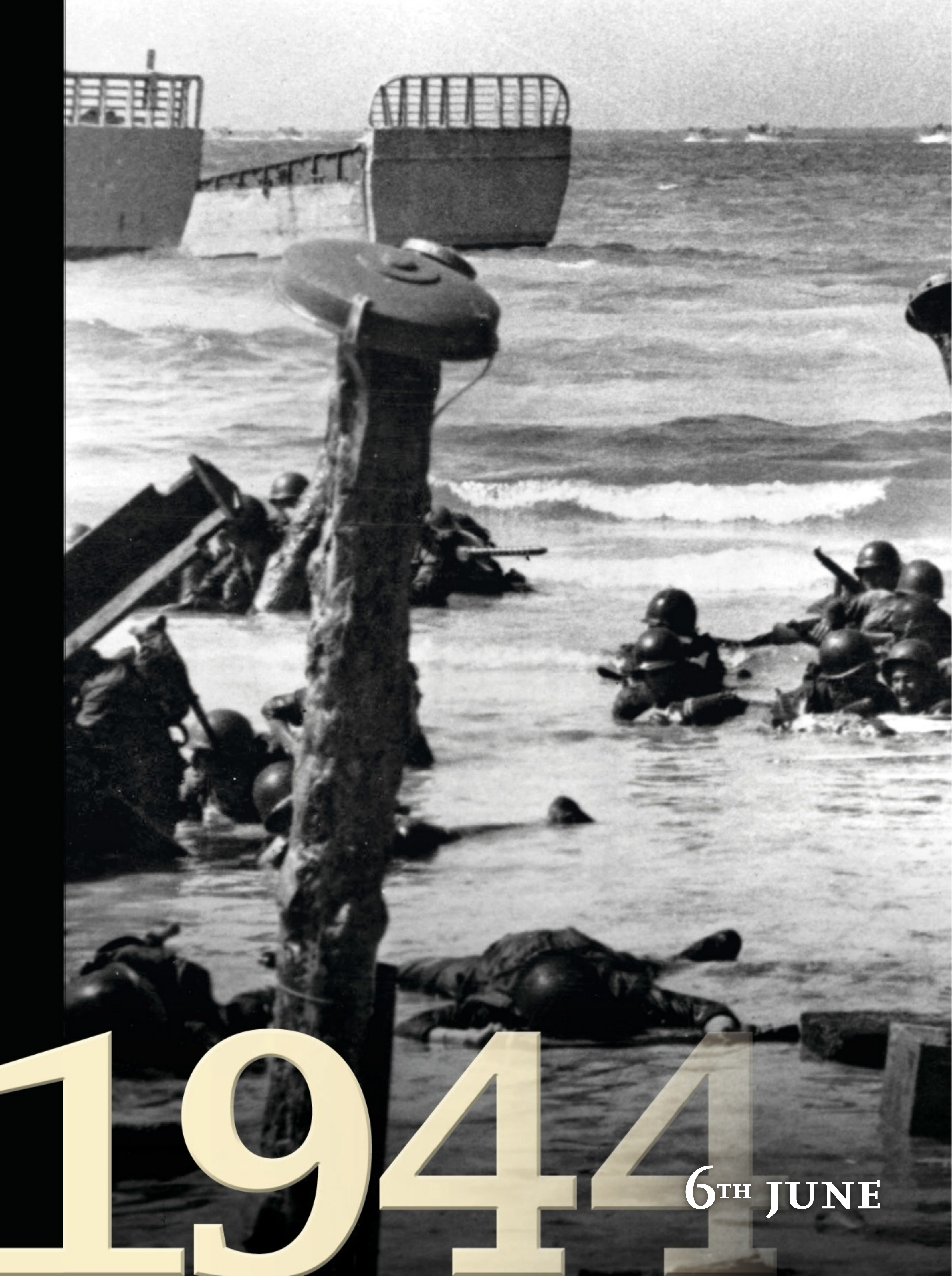
These setbacks meant that Benito Mussolini, who had ruled the country with an iron fist since 1922, became increasingly unpopular. In March 1943, many workers went on strike. And with the Allied invasion of Sicily, the Italian army, along with Mussolini's personal authority, was close to collapse. On 24th July, as the Allies advanced across Sicily, Il Duce was given a vote of no confidence by the Grand Council of Fascism. The following day, he was formally deposed in accordance with the constitution by the king, Victor Emmanuel III. As soon as Mussolini left the palace, he was arrested.

The new interim government feared that the Germans would attempt to free the dictator, so Mussolini was moved around until finally imprisoned in a remote hotel in the Abruzzo region of eastern Italy. Their fears were justified because Hitler refused to abandon his ally. The Führer gave a personal order to launch a rescue operation, which was put in the hands of commando Otto Skorzeny.

Standing over 1.9 metres tall, the sturdily built Skorzeny was one of the Nazis' toughest warriors and specialised in covert operations. He put together a small force that landed at Mussolini's hotel in gliders. The guards were caught so unawares that Skorzeny and his men were able to free the dictator without firing a single shot. Later, Mussolini would be deployed as head of a puppet fascist republic in northern Italy, under the control of the Germans.

As a reward for his efforts, Skorzeny was awarded the Knight's Cross, and even the Allies recognised his abilities. Winston Churchill described him as "the most dangerous man in Europe".

After his liberation, Mussolini flew to Vienna with his rescuer, Otto Skorzeny.


1944
6th JUNE

Allied forces landing on the Normandy beaches had to get past a series of deadly obstacles, such as "Czech hedgehogs" and "Rommel's asparagus", as well as a hail of gunfire.

INVASION OF NORMANDY

HELL AWAITED US SOLDIERS ON OMAHA BEACH

History's largest armada set sail from the south coast of England. Its aim was to invade Normandy and wrest Western Europe from Hitler's grip. But the Germans stood ready behind a deadly defence on the cliffs above Omaha Beach. The price of victory would be high.

THE STAGE IS SET

The Allies have been planning a large-scale landing in France since 1940. By spring 1944, the invasion force is ready, but on the other side of the Channel, the Germans have put together a formidable defence. The coast is protected by strong fortifications, while Nazi machine guns stand ready to give Allied troops a warm welcome.

Omaha Beach
FRANCE

German scout Corporal Heinrich Severloh focussed his binoculars. It was 05.30 on 6th June 1944, and he'd spent all night looking out across the English Channel from a cold observation post on the Normandy cliffs. As the morning fog cleared, a series of black dots appeared over the horizon, and through his binocular lenses, Severloh watched with horror as they grew.

The dots coalesced into ships – lots of them, of various sizes. As they drew closer to shore, the ominous drone of aircraft sounded in the air.

"They're coming!" shouted frightened German soldiers, as they sprinted for the nearest bunker or shelter.

The bombers roared across the coast, releasing their deadly cargo. The first bomb exploded just 50 metres behind Severloh's position, throwing up soil and lumps of limestone around the corporal in the quaking bunker. The Germans breathed a sigh of relief as the rest of the Allied bombs fell in fields and forests behind them.

Meanwhile, the silhouettes of the enemy ships became clearer against the steel grey sky, and within moments, the vessels' guns began to shake the earth under the Germans once more. Over the next half hour, 10,600 rockets and shells roared over the shore. On the clifftop, the air became thick with smoke and dust.

When Severloh again trained his binoculars on the water, he saw hundreds of landing craft heading over the waves. The corporal sprinted to the communications bunker. "Now it's starting! They're landing!" he yelled to his superior. The lieutenant, however, showed no fear as he thought of the formidable firepower that awaited the US troops and said simply: "Poor swine."

Allies expected losses in the thousands

The German army knew that at some point in 1944 the Allies would embark on a large-scale landing on the continent – probably in France – but knowing exactly where and when became a major headache for Hitler and his generals.

The US and Britain had been preparing the invasion – Operation Overlord – for years, and deceiving the Germans was a crucial part of the plan. While double agents filled the Nazis with false intelligence, the Allies set up a whole ghost army with inflatable tanks and fake planes in Dover on the Kentish coast to fool the Germans into thinking that the landing would be made in or around Calais.

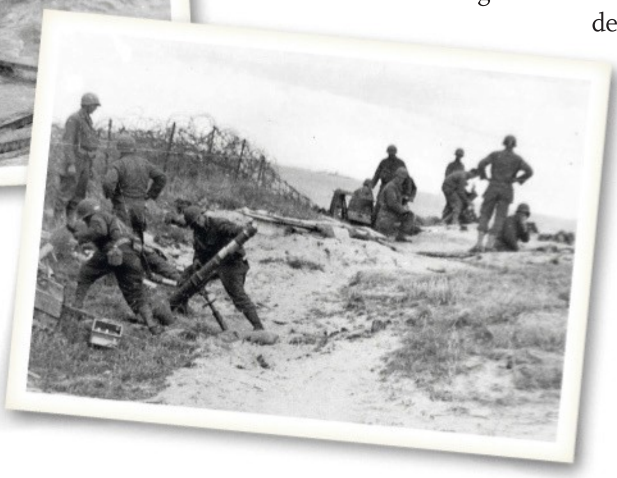
In fact, the plan was to storm the beaches of Normandy shortly after paratroopers had been dropped inland to capture key bridges and prevent German reinforcements being deployed to aid the defenders on the beaches.

Hitler's infamous Atlantic Wall fortifications meant the entire French coastline was heavily guarded, but the Allies hoped the Nazis would succumb to the pressure of the 150,000 soldiers who would go ashore on D-Day. Operation Overlord commanders Dwight D Eisenhower and Bernard Montgomery knew that thousands of soldiers would be killed on the beaches, but the generals were ready to pay such a high price to crush Nazi Germany.

While British and Canadian troops were tasked with capturing the eastern beaches, code-named Sword, Juno and Gold, the Americans would invade Omaha and Utah. All targets were carefully photographed from aircraft. But one detail was not caught on the photographs. The eight-kilometre-long Omaha Beach was not – as the Americans mistakenly believed – defended by inexperienced soldiers. Instead, it was manned by seasoned veterans called in from the Eastern Front.

From an advanced system of bunkers on top of the 40-metre-high cliffs, defenders had an ideal view of the beach, with barbed wire, mines and purpose-built barriers providing a deadly obstacle course for the

Soldiers made sure they lifted their arms above the water as they came ashore.



When the tide was low, troops with heavy artillery could move forward on the beach.

attacking forces. Only five gullies led inland, and they were thoroughly covered by German machine guns and artillery.

When the Allied ships set sail from various ports along the south coast, the soldiers taking part in this perilous mission were in no doubt that this could be their last.

"I consoled myself with the fact that I was insured for the maximum amount of the GI insurance plan, and that my parents would at least have ten thousand dollars to compensate them for my death," recounted one of the approximately 1,500 men selected for the first assault wave on Omaha.

"Paratrooper crickets" allowed GIs to distinguish friend from foe. A single click was to be answered by two.

But despite the risk, it was also clear that the actual invasion, Operation Neptune, was crucial to crushing the Third Reich. Eisenhower had ingrained the message in each soldier.

"You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you," were the general's words that were read to the men on the ships on the evening of 5th June.

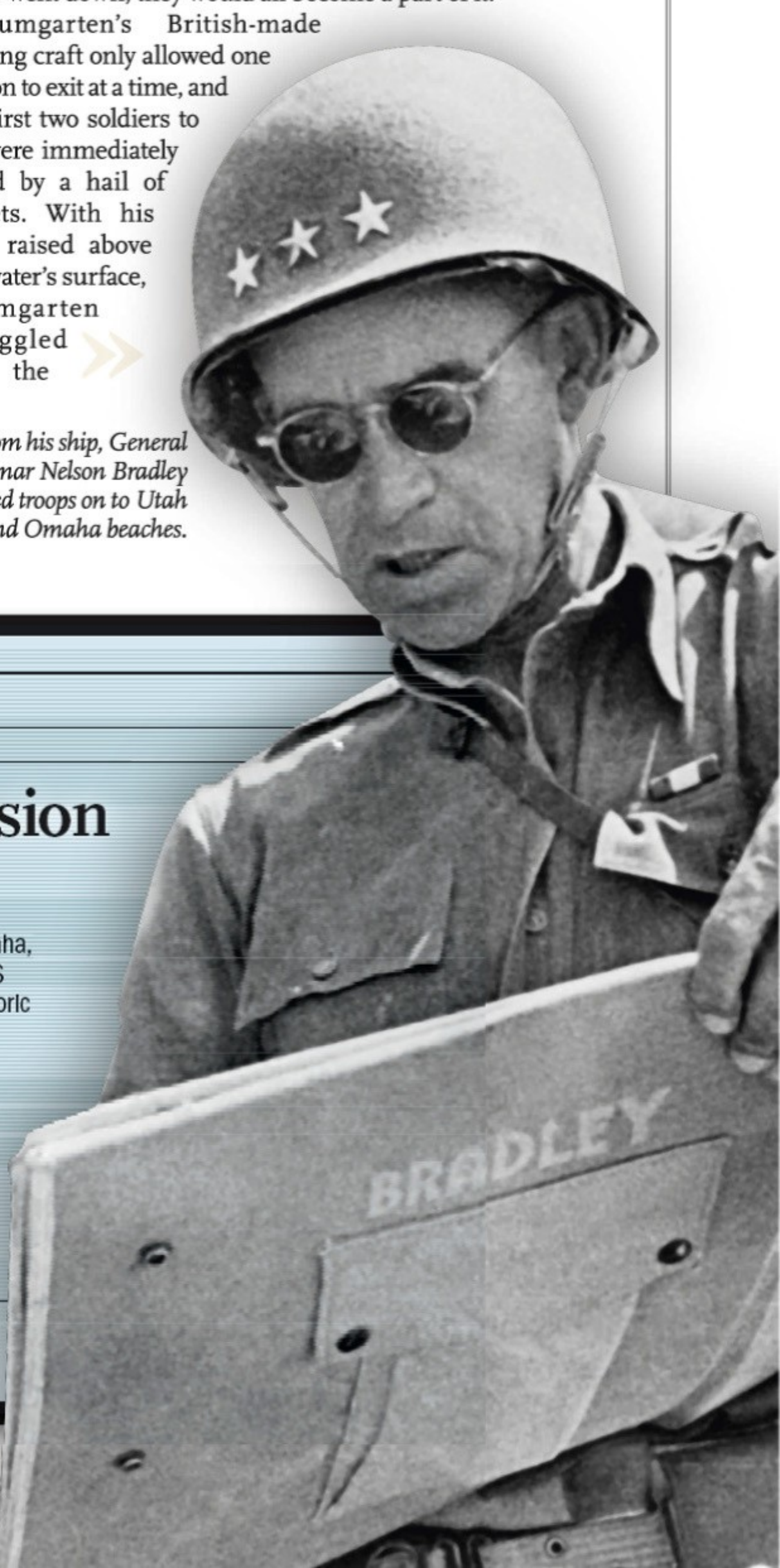
SOLDIERS DIED IN THE LANDING BOATS

As the clock ticked towards 06.30 on 6th June, the Allies' flat-bottomed landing craft had been bouncing over half-metre waves for an hour en route to the Normandy coast. Water splashed into the vessels, soaking the 30-odd men crammed into each one. The Americans had already enjoyed a substantial breakfast with "as much steak, pork, chicken, ice cream, and candy" as they could eat, as one infantryman put it. But the heavy seas exacted their revenge as one seasick soldier after another emptied the contents of his stomach out on deck.

"I was so seasick I didn't care if a bullet hit me between the eyes and got me out of my misery," recalled a combat engineer.

US soldier Harold Baumgarten, from Company B, 29th Infantry Division, had avoided seasickness in part by chewing gum and sucking on sweets while continuously swallowing. But the 19-year-old New Yorker was unable to avoid nausea after the neighbouring boat was hit by a shell, and splintered metal and body parts rained into his boat. Up ahead, hell awaited, and when the ramp went down, they would all become a part of it.

Baumgarten's British-made landing craft only allowed one person to exit at a time, and the first two soldiers to try were immediately felled by a hail of bullets. With his rifle raised above the water's surface, Baumgarten struggled into the »


From his ship, General Omar Nelson Bradley led troops on to Utah and Omaha beaches.

1893-1981

NAME **OMAR NELSON BRADLEY**

TITLE GENERAL

General Bradley led invasion from the sea

With primary responsibility for the forces that invaded Utah and Omaha, General Omar Nelson Bradley played a leading role on D-Day. The US general did not doubt that the invasion of Normandy would be a historic milestone: "This is going to be the greatest show on earth. You are honoured by having grandstand seats," he promised troops. But he conceded he was too far away from the action during the invasion. Radio communication broke down, and Bradley wrote after the war that the battle was beyond the reach of the generals and admirals.

Among the rank and file, Bradley was known as polite and easy to deal with, giving him the name "The Soldiers' General". Bradley was made a five-star general in 1950 – one of just nine Americans to attain the rank.

- **Was a big fan of horse racing and visiting racecourses.**
- **Died of cardiac arrhythmia, minutes after being honoured.**

water and towards the beach. Bullets whipped past, but he made it ashore to take cover behind an anti-tank Belgian Gate, one of the many obstacles left on the beach. Unfortunately, his first act was to witness a comrade killed in the surf.

"While running, we witnessed horrible sights... There were men with guts hanging out of their wounds and body parts lying along our path," Baumgarten recounted.

SINGLE GERMAN INITIATED SLAUGHTER

Even before the first Allies had placed a foot on Omaha beach, Severloh had tumbled into Widerstandsnest 62 – one of the 14 main bunkers along the beach's cliffs. WN 62 contained two 76.5-mm guns, one anti-tank gun and a grenade launcher, but Severloh grabbed one of the bunker's MG 42 machine guns that could fire 1,400 rounds per minute.

Through the lookout, he saw how the landing boats approached the beach one by one, and the moment a ramp was lowered, he resolutely squeezed the hot metal trigger. "I do not know how many men I shot," Severloh admitted in 2004. "It was awful. Thinking about it makes me want to throw up. I almost emptied an entire infantry landing craft. The sea was red around it."

Such thoughts hadn't burdened the corporal in the heat of battle, however. When he wasn't firing deadly volleys at the landing boats, Severloh shot at anything that moved in the water and on the beach. As the tide was still low, the Americans' boots sank into the sand as they reached the shore, making them easy targets as they stumbled forward. Many – like Baumgarten – tried sheltering behind the Germans' obstacles or the few amphibious vehicles that had reached land after battling the rigours of the waves.

Severloh, who became known as the "Beast of Omaha" for his exploits, was periodically forced to switch to a Karabiner 98k bolt-action rifle, allowing him to target individual soldiers while his machine gun cooled down.

Meanwhile, the Germans could watch from their bunker holes as the tide rose minute by minute, slowly sliding over the wounded GIs on the beach, filling their lungs with water. US soldiers had strict orders not to rescue the wounded; it was simply too dangerous. Instead, they battled to reach a seawall 300 metres up the beach, from where they could shelter from German bullets.

Baumgarten struggled across the beach, all the time looking for a hiding place, when an 88-mm shell suddenly exploded 20 metres in front of him, its shrapnel tearing through his left cheek. His upper jaw was shattered, and his palate ripped in two.

Despite his horrific injuries, Baumgarten still managed to reach the wall, where he threw himself down alongside those from the 116th Infantry Regiment who had also made it that

The moment the ramps went down on the landing boats, US GIs were exposed to enemy bullets. Many did not even reach the beach – some were caught in the high seas and their heavy equipment pulled them under the water.

The Douglas C-47 Skytrain got soldiers off the ground.

PARACHUTE FORCES

🇺🇸	TROOPS:	13,000
	† DEAD OR WOUNDED:	3,650
🇬🇧	TROOPS:	8,500
	† DEAD OR WOUNDED:	1,500

far. At this point, the troops were in shock, according to one corporal: "There were men crying with fear, men defecating themselves. I lay there with some others, too petrified to move... It was like a mass paralysis. I couldn't see an officer. At one point something hit [me] on the arm. I thought I'd taken a bullet. It was somebody's hand, taken clear off by something."

Cool general rescued the offensive

Amid the chaos, Brigadier General Norman D Cota waded ashore. From his landing boat, the 51-year-old American – second in command of the 29th Infantry Division – had seen how hordes of tanks, bulldozers and amphibious vehicles either capsized in the waves or sailed into the German mines. Without proper artillery support, Cota knew that he had to rally the surviving Americans to cross the heavily mined beach. From here, they could advance through the marshlands to reach the cliffs from where the Germans bombarded the open beach.

"Two kinds of people are staying on this beach," he told the troops cowering behind the seawall. "The dead and those who are going to die. Now let's get the hell out of here."

Cota waved his .45 Colt as he walked along the wall to find a suitable target site. His fearlessness rubbed off on the men. While a soldier fired against a defence position on the nearest cliff with his Browning automatic rifle, other soldiers placed Bangalore torpedoes underneath the barbed-wire barricades. The explosive charges in the metre-long pipes went off, and when the wire was split, the first American climbed through the opening. The unfortunate soldier was promptly pierced by bullets from a German machine gun shell.

"Medico! Medico, I'm hit. Help me!" cried the soldier. His cries of "Mama" finally ebbed away as he died, and the sight of their stricken comrade led to further hesitation – until General Cota once again took control.

"C'mon! If an old buzzard like me can do that so can you," the general said resolutely, wading through the burning and smoking grass of marshland without hesitation.

Soon the rest of the group followed, while others on the seawall also dared to enter the dangerous minefield. In the absence of minesweepers, the vanguard crept forward with hunting knives, and a few soldiers were blown up as a warning to their colleagues further behind. No one had time to help tend open fractures or torn hands. The enemy bunkers on the cliffs had to be put out of action if the nightmare was to finally end.

Skytrain flew during battle

820 US transport aircraft showed their worth the night before D-Day when they dropped paratroopers into France.

A fleet of 820 C-47 Skytrains played a crucial role on the night before the invasion by ferrying 13,000 paratroopers inland behind the Normandy coast. The paratroopers' main mission was to capture the hinterland's key bridges and roads to prevent German reinforcements from joining their ranks.

The aircraft proved extremely robust. Despite massive shelling, the Germans only managed to shoot down 21 of the planes. More Skytrains were hit and damaged but managed to make the return journey across the English Channel. Here mechanics repaired the planes so quickly they were able to fly again.

On the evening of 5th June 1944, General Dwight D Eisenhower roused paratroopers for battle.

Destroyers tipped the balance

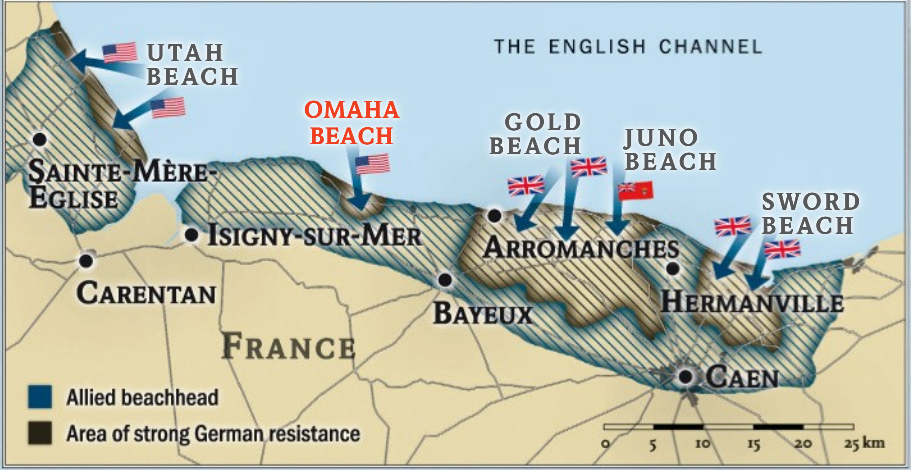
The Germans had complete control of Omaha Beach for the first three hours that morning. The chaotic landing in high seas that had drowned soldiers and capsized amphibious vehicles had left the invaders more vulnerable than expected. They lost hundreds of soldiers in the first attack wave alone, and many more like Harold Baumgarten were so badly wounded that they could not fight on.

Out at sea, Commander Omar Nelson Bradley from the USS *Augusta* had ordered his forces towards both Utah and Omaha beach, yet it was also clear that the advance forces had not secured control. The disaster at Omaha was so bad that at 09.15, Bradley contemplated withdrawing his troops from the bloody beach to concentrate purely on Utah.

The general decided to stay the course, however, and at 09.50, he ordered his destroyers to sail towards the coast to reduce the German bunkers to rubble. At a

14 hours of fighting on the beach

Over the course of more than half a day, Allied invasion forces fought for control of the almost 500-metre-wide Omaha Beach. The soldiers risked life and limb before they finally won control of the D-Day invasion's bloodiest beach.


THE ENGLISH CHANNEL
UTAH BEACH
OMAHA BEACH
GOLD BEACH
JUNO BEACH
SWORD BEACH
SAINTE-MÈRE-EGLISE
ISIGNY-SUR-MER
CARENTAN
BAYEUX
ARROMANCHES
HERMANVILLE
CAEN
FRANCE
■ Allied beachhead
■ Area of strong German resistance
0 5 10 15 20 25 km

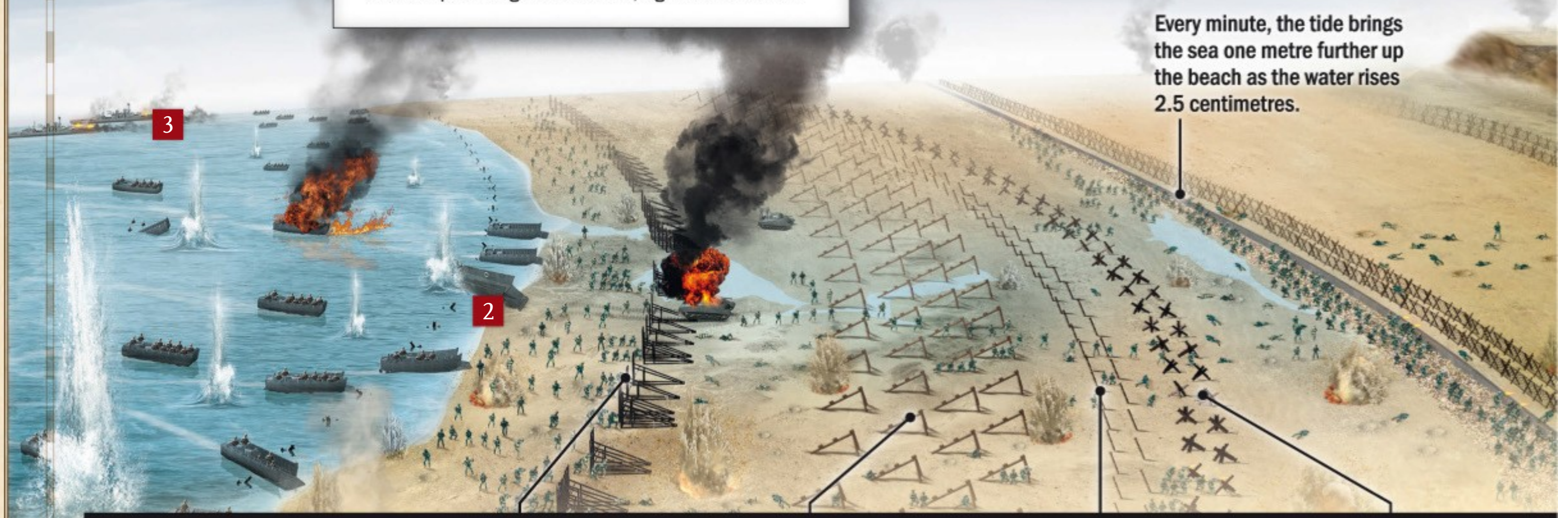
Five beaches secured a foothold on the mainland
Around 150,000 Allied soldiers invaded the coast of Normandy. Commanders chose these beaches not because they were relatively close to the English coast, but because the German defences weren't as solid here as in the densely fortified area around Calais.

1 The bombardment begins

■ **05.30:** Allied bombers begin the assault on Omaha Beach. **The bombs fail to have any impact**, however, as they land behind the German bunkers; 15 minutes later they're joined by guns from battleships sitting off the coast, again to no effect.

2 The first troops go ashore

■ **06.30:** Landing boats reach the beach before the tide has covered the German defence system of Belgian Gates, wooden stakes, mines and Czech hedgehogs. German machine guns start firing as they disembark. **Soldiers must move 300 metres** to find shelter behind a seawall.



Every minute, the tide brings the sea one metre further up the beach as the water rises 2.5 centimetres.

Deadly obstacles waited on the beach

The Germans placed more than 3,700 obstacles on Omaha Beach alone. Many were designed to slow the enemy landing craft at high tide, so the Allies chose to attack at low tide instead.

Belgian Gates

Heavy iron gates from Belgium, three metres wide and weighing 1,280 kg, were placed to slow Allied tanks.

Wooden beams

At high tide, landing boats would glide up the beam to detonate a Teller mine mounted on top of it.

More mines

"Rommel's asparagus" were wooden posts 4-5 metres high with a mine on top – aimed at disrupting paratroopers.

Czech hedgehogs

1.5-metre-high angled beams of iron were used as anti-tank obstacles.

3 Destroyers bomb bunkers

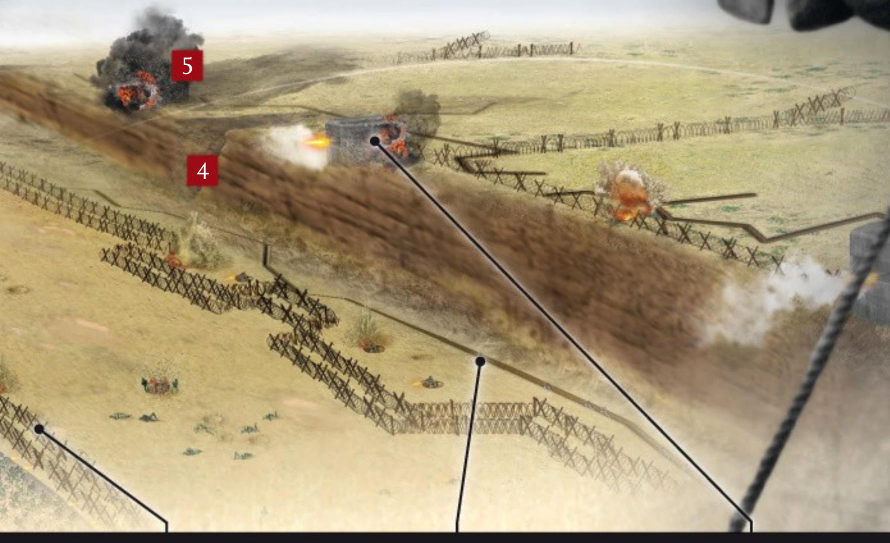
■ **09.50:** After the advance slows with heavy Marine casualties, **Allied destroyers sail closer to shore** – within one kilometre – so they can shell the German fortifications. This, coupled with increasing numbers of tanks reaching the shore, puts the Germans under increasing pressure.

4 Troops clear the ravines

■ **14.00:** US troops occupy the first of five routes leading inland. **Soldiers are now starting to drive tanks and trucks off the increasingly crowded beach**. During the afternoon, the other four roads are also captured.

5 Last bastion falls

■ **17.00:** Virtually all German bunkers are already in US hands, **and the final one is taken at 17.00**. By 20.00, three nearby villages are also under Allied control. When the day is done, the forces on Omaha Beach occupy an area 10 kilometres wide that stretches two kilometres inland.



Barbed wire

Behind the seawall, the wire prevented soldiers from advancing forward. Instead, they had to blow their way through.

Machine guns waited

The Nazi machine gunners waited in both trenches and bunkers.

Pockets of resistance

14 bunkers formed the core of Omaha Beach's defences. From these, Germans could cover both the beach and the roads inland. Each bunker was equipped with artillery, mortars and machine guns.

Lanyards with hooks and climbing equipment helped elite forces climb the near-vertical cliff to capture a German gun battery.

The Americans lost seven percent of their invasion force on Omaha Beach. By the evening, once they'd seized the beach, 2,400 men had either died, disappeared or been wounded. Here, the injured wait to be transported away from Omaha.

distance of just 900 metres from the shore, eight US and three British warships sneaked in and fired heavy shells at the enemy. The guns were firing so furiously that sailors had to spray cold water on them to prevent overheating. At the same time, several amphibious vehicles rolled ashore, and soon bulldozers drove into the steep stone wall to make gaps that the tanks could get through. Many of the bodies on the beach were crushed under tonnes of heavy machinery, but the impact of this massive effort couldn't be mistaken – pressure on the Germans grew, and several defences were smashed to smithereens.

"Things look better," a colonel on the beach radioed to the command ship USS *Ancon* at 10.46.

A strong and steady stream of US soldiers now stretched across the marsh in long, serpentine rows, sticking to the paths the others had come through to avoid being blown up by mines.

"The scene below reminded me of the Chicago stockyard cattle pens and its slaughter house," said one private after reaching the bluff.

When the Americans reached the top of the cliff, they threw grenades into the German trenches and bunkers. Although Nazi troops' bullets filled the air around their heads, infantry and US Rangers – American commandos – continued their slow push into German territory. The attackers captured several gun emplacements, while new troops continued to appear from behind the cliffs. As C Company of the 116th Regiment made its way to the top, the unit reached Cota, who stood with his Colt twirling around his finger.

"Where the hell have you been, boys?" was the general's sardonic greeting.

Germans fled the coast

Severloh's optimism faded as he watched the US advance through the hole in WN 62's concrete facade. The morning's easy pickings had given way to a more feverish defence as his MG 42 panned around to stop the enemy's soldiers. The Beast of Omaha had fired thousands of bullets at the Americans, but he was running low on ammunition. His only option now was to feed the machine gun with tracer

Paratroopers packed their own parachutes the night before D-Day.

cartridges. Tracers were as deadly as ordinary projectiles but had the enormous disadvantage of lighting up whenever they were fired. Every time he pulled the trigger, he revealed his position.

Over the next 10 minutes, Severloh was flung away from his weapon four times as shells exploded near his bunker. Each time, smoke filled the German's lungs and his ears rang from the explosions. It was time for him and his comrades in WN 62 to flee inland.

Soldier after soldier climbed out of the bunker's opening and ran, searching for shell craters they could use to shelter in briefly during their escape. After 500 metres, Severloh finally dared to catch his breath and wait for those behind, but only one appeared. The two survivors continued to their battalion headquarters in the village of Colleville, 1.5 kilometres from the coast, where a physician treated Severloh's facial wounds.

"We're waiting for the tanks," their commander told them. "Then we'll kick those Americans out again."

What none of them knew was that over 20,000 Allied paratroopers had landed the previous night, capturing key bridges to prevent German reinforcements from arriving at the beaches. At the same time, Allied fighter-bombers had been targeting tanks that attempted to cross the fields. The Germans' ability to maintain control of the Normandy coastline was about to be exhausted.

The Allies established beachheads

By 12.30, the Americans had landed 18,772 troops on Omaha, and landing craft continued to unload vehicles and equipment on to the beach. Little by little, the sound of German gunfire grew silent. At 13.09, Bradley received an encouraging message: "Troops formerly pinned down on beaches... advancing up heights behind beaches."

Fighting continued in the ravines, but within a few hours, they too fell under Allied control. Inside a few bunkers, Germans continued to fight to the last man, as Hitler had ordered, but most defenders took to their heels. At 14.58, forces from General Cota's 29th Division captured Colleville, taking Germans soldiers prisoner in the process.

Meanwhile, army medics remained under pressure on Omaha, where the injured covered the beach. Medics patched up the wounds as best they could and gave the victims shots of morphine, but often they couldn't help much.

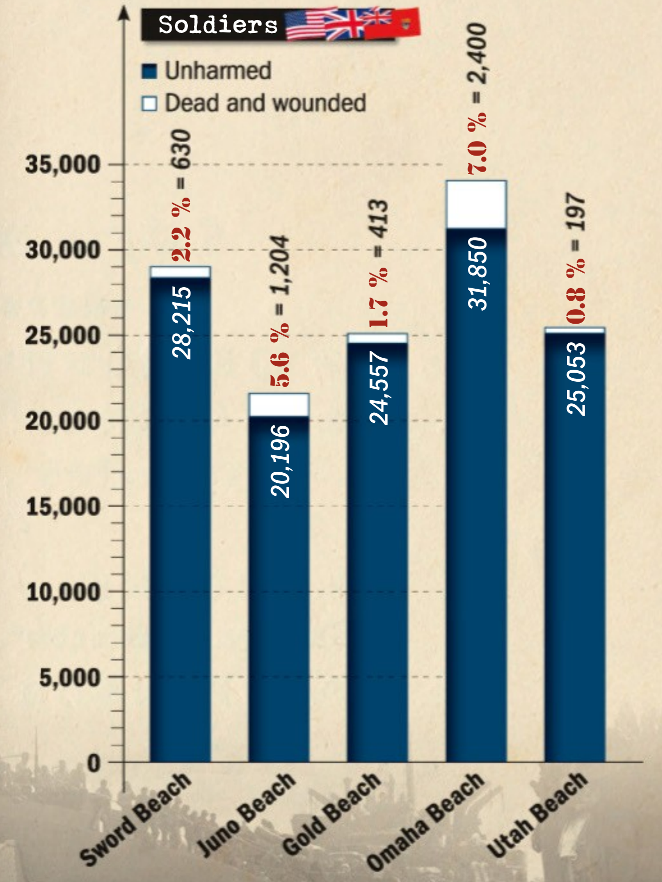
"I saw one young soldier, pale, crying and in obvious pain with his intestines out under his uniform. There was nothing I could do except inject morphine and comfort him. He soon died," recounted a captain from one of the Americans' medical battalions.

Blood had not so much flowed as gushed on Omaha Beach on 6th June, but the US could rejoice that the victims had not fallen in vain. By evening, the forces had taken the hostile beach and controlled a beachhead just over two kilometres inland. The mission had also succeeded on the four other invasion beaches. During the day at Sword, Juno and Gold beaches, Brits and Canadians had moved almost eight kilometres inland to gain footholds inside the cities of Caen and Bayeux. And at Utah, US troops had lost just 200 men. The total price for the victory was thousands of lives, but the Allies now had a firm foothold on continental Europe, and Nazi Germany's days were numbered.

The Allies avoided catastrophe

Although fighting on Omaha Beach was bloody when measured in human lives, the price of D-Day was nowhere near as high as generals had feared.

Allied casualties on D-Day

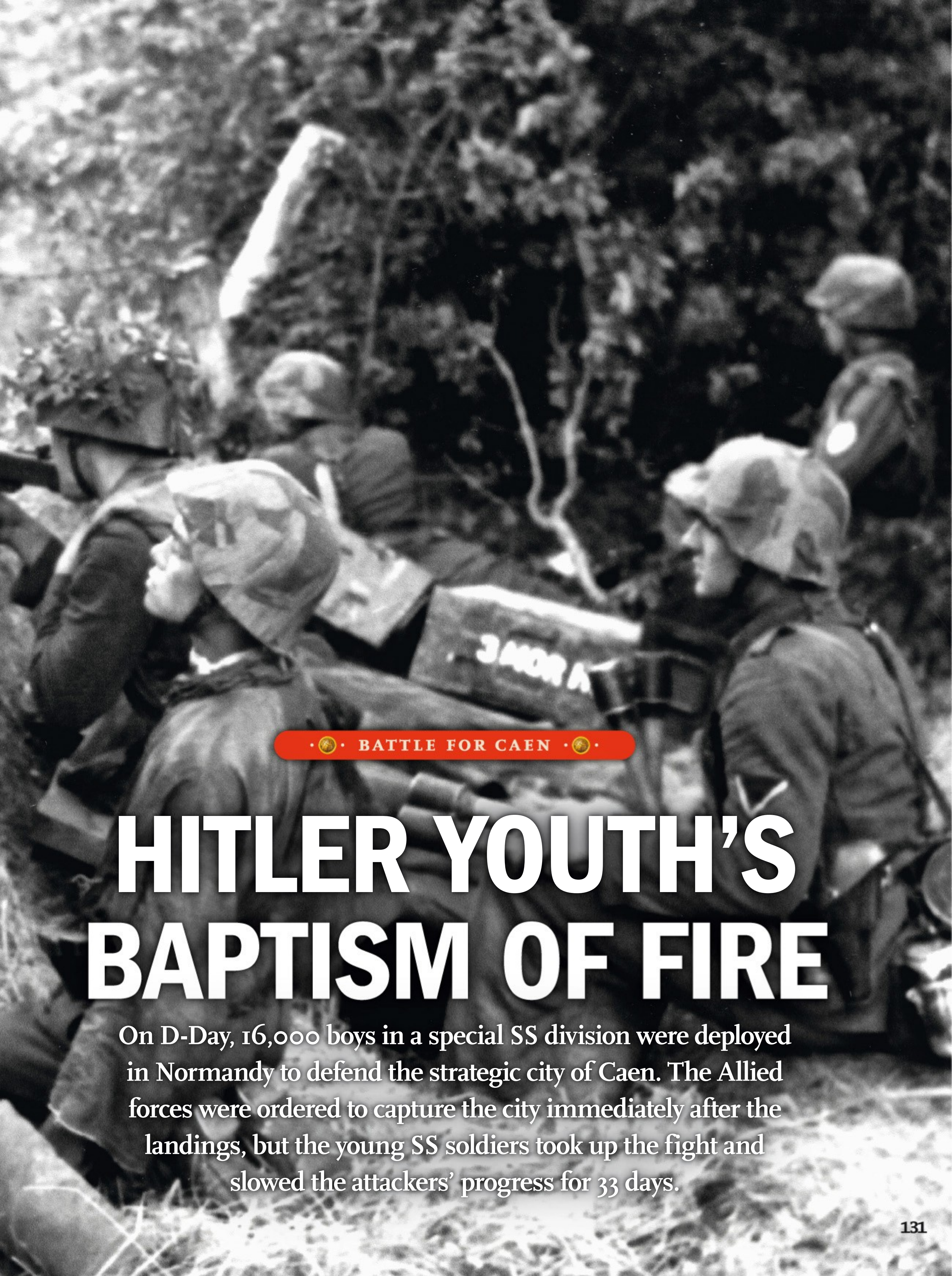


After the invasion, the Allies were able to land their troops peacefully.

Armed with machine guns and other weapons, the young German soldiers were left to defend Caen.

1944

7TH JUNE



BATTLE FOR CAEN

HITLER YOUTH'S BAPTISM OF FIRE

On D-Day, 16,000 boys in a special SS division were deployed in Normandy to defend the strategic city of Caen. The Allied forces were ordered to capture the city immediately after the landings, but the young SS soldiers took up the fight and slowed the attackers' progress for 33 days.

THE STAGE IS SET

Normandy 1944

CAEN
FRANCE

After D-Day, Allied forces set course for the French city of Caen. Hitler, however, believes that the invasion of Normandy is merely a sham, so refuses to sacrifice important troops in defending the city. Instead, the untested Hitler Youth division is sent to Caen. The young soldiers dig down and get ready to fight to the last.

The emblem of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend.

"COVER!" THE SHOUT RANG OUT across the square as low-flying planes roared overhead. The soldiers threw themselves on the ground. Finally, what they'd been waiting and preparing for over many weeks was happening: the Allies had arrived and the battle had begun. Seventeen-year-old Sturmmann Hellmuth Pock looked up at the aircraft passing right above his head. When he spotted the German roundels, he jumped up and waved his arms in the air. The others followed, and soon the shouts of "Bravo" and "Heil" were heard among the clouds. The pilots acknowledged the cheers by dipping their wings. Their display of power and determination excited the young men on the ground.

The fog hung like a fine, grey veil over the green hills of Normandy as Pock and his comrades drove towards the coast on the morning of 6th June 1944. The 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitlerjugend" – which, including officers, numbered 20,540 men, 148 tanks and 333 other vehicles – was facing a baptism of fire. The soldiers were thrilled at the thought of rushing forward across the fields and driving the enemy back into the sea. None was aware of what awaited them and of the reason behind their division's creation.

Since the defeat at Stalingrad the year before, the army had lacked manpower, and morale had begun to decline. The German military leadership knew that an Allied invasion of France was imminent, but could scarcely spare any troops from the Eastern Front. The solution – proposed by the SS and approved by Hitler – was to create a new SS division of volunteer Hitler Youth boys born in 1926: a small army of 17-year-olds. Thanks to the ideological training of the Nazi youth organisation, Germany could rely on having a division of highly motivated boys willing to sacrifice themselves for the fatherland.

Rocket launchers were among the weapons the Germans deployed in the defence of Caen.

VICTORY AWAITED

German troops poured in from all directions. In armoured personnel carriers, on trucks, and on motorcycles, they sped

The Hitler Youth Division had 148 tanks, including the Panzer IV.

towards the coast. Not a single enemy aircraft was in sight. Pock assumed that the Luftwaffe had already cleared the skies. The task of the Hitler Youth Division was first and foremost to defend the city of Caen, which was located 14 kilometres from the invasion beach and formed an important transport hub, with major roads spreading out to the rest of France. It probably wouldn't be difficult, because the Allies were far inferior to the Germans, the youngsters had been taught. For a moment, the thought crossed Pock's mind that the battle might even be over before they arrived. Just think if it were already finished – it would be almost unbearable!

Pock's unit waited for one of the division's other columns at a crossroads. He watched the camouflaged vehicles going past, looking like moving shrubbery. Under their steel helmets, the young faces radiated anticipation and confidence.

"Good luck, comrades!" called Pock, waving as the last vehicles went by. As his own unit set off again, it almost felt as if he could reach out and touch victory.

At noon, they encountered a completely different kind of column. Pock and his comrades stared in disbelief at the distorted scrap metal at the roadside as they tried to figure out what kind of vehicles the burnt-out metal skeletons had once been. Ammunition lay everywhere on the ground between the bodies of German soldiers, blown up beyond recognition. The Allied fighter-bombers had struck with crushing superiority. On an armoured personnel carrier, the rear hatch stood open, and Pock could see the legs and lower body of a soldier sticking out. To his horror, he realised that the man's top half had been burned away. As the horrific sight etched itself into his brain, Pock hoped that a merciful bullet had killed the soldier before the flames had consumed him.

Further on, the soldiers suddenly heard the sound of aircraft, and the next moment, a whole swarm appeared above them. The enemy. Pock and his comrades opened fire with their handguns. Nothing happened. Astonished, Pock watched the planes continue straight on. Not a single trace of smoke in the sky gave them any hope that the

1910-1961

NAME **KURT MEYER**

TITLE SS BRIGADEFÜHRER & DIVISION COMMANDER

War criminal led boys

SS officer Kurt Meyer took over the post of head of the Hitler Youth Division in the middle of the Battle for Caen, when the division's commander was killed in an artillery attack. After the battle, Meyer led his division at Falaise before ending up in Allied captivity. After World War II, the SS officer was convicted for the killing of 18 prisoners of war by his troops in Normandy.

- **Became a member of SS in 1931.**
- **Released from captivity in 1954.**

Blut und Ehre!

Knives with the motto "Blood and Honour" formed part of the Hitler Youth boys' equipment.

German weapons had hit their mark. "These damned dogs don't notice anything at all," one of the young men cursed bitterly, as the planes disappeared towards the horizon.

Trapped in a burning tank

At the age of 19, Alois Morawetz was the youngest panzer commander in the 3rd Company. For two days, his tanks had crept through the countryside so as not to be spotted by enemy aircraft. Since D-Day, three days earlier, the Allies had rapidly advanced and captured several towns west of Caen.

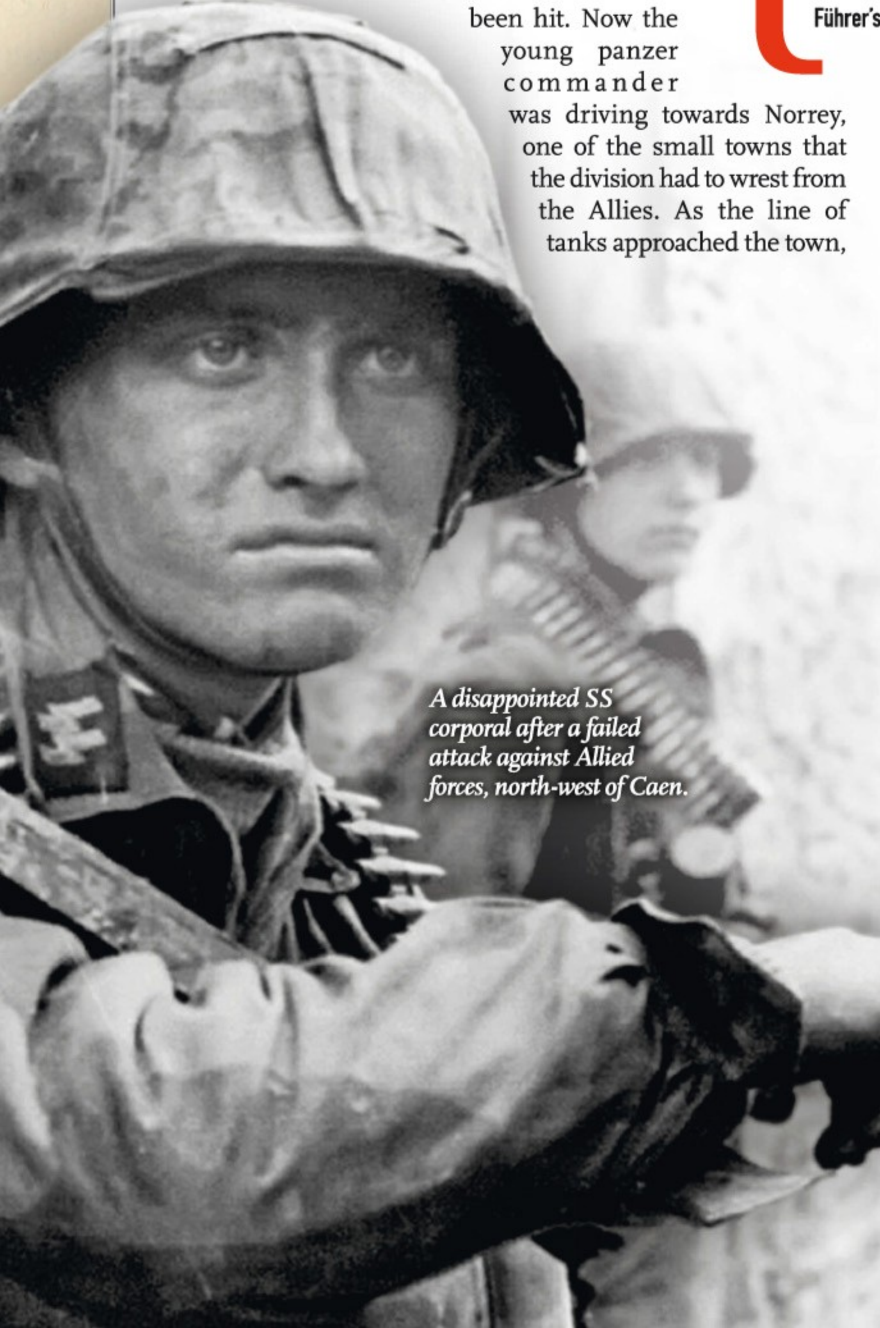
Contrary to what the young men had thought, the Luftwaffe was in a deplorable state and unable to support the troops on the ground. Still, Morawetz felt lucky, because even though his unit had been under direct fire, no one had been hit. Now the young panzer commander was driving towards Norrey, one of the small towns that the division had to wrest from the Allies. As the line of tanks approached the town, Morawetz stayed close to a railway embankment. In his headphones, he heard his unit's code name, "Waiting Room", followed by the order: "Swing to the left!" Morawetz confirmed the command, repeated it over the radio to his tanks, and swung out away from the embankment. From his tank's turret, he looked out over fields and meadows. The sun was high in the sky and everything seemed peaceful. Morawetz crawled into his fighting position in the turret and closed the hatch.

Adolf Hitler gave his name to only one division other than the Hitler Youth division: 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler", originally the Führer's own bodyguard.

There was an enormous bang. The entire armoured vehicle shook, as though hit by a giant hammer, then stopped. Dazed, Morawetz realised that the tank was on fire. He heard a crackling noise. The fire had reached the machine-gun ammunition. He tried to open the turret's hatch, but it was stuck. In the semi-darkness, he called out to his gunner and driver, but it was obvious that no one could still be alive down in the tank's burning interior.

Morawetz pushed his palms against the hatch again, but the solid steel plate didn't budge. Beneath him, the hot flames began to lick up into the turret. Desperately, he continued to struggle with the hatch, then miraculously, it suddenly opened. Light streamed in, accompanied by the blasts of exploding grenades. They were under deadly enemy fire. Morawetz jumped down from the tank and ran a few metres. Everything went black and he fell to the ground.

When Morawetz regained consciousness, he was surrounded by burning German tanks. Unsteadily, he got to his feet and started to stagger towards a medic, who was standing by a motorbike and sidecar a few hundred metres away. Morawetz looked around – from every direction, other soldiers were approaching with scorched uniforms and burnt faces, while the enemy's bullets continued to whizz around their ears. The medic ushered Morawetz into the sidecar, then he shot off at breakneck speed.



A disappointed SS corporal after a failed attack against Allied forces, north-west of Caen.

Hitler Youth had to fend for itself

The futile counterattack in which Morawetz's unit was involved cost the Hitler Youth Division dearly, but the Germans were doing everything they could to keep the remaining armoured vehicles going.

In the middle of the night, Hellmuth Pock was sent out to repair a tank's damaged steering wheel. The air inside the vehicle was still warm after the long, hot day. In the darkness, he groped for something to hold on to and was surprised to find his hands gliding over something slippery.

"Our commander was killed in action. His head was ripped off. I know that the whole interior is a mess," the tank's gunner apologised. "It's all right. There's nothing you can do," Pock replied. He didn't know what else to say. In silence, he tried to wipe his hands on the side of the vehicle.

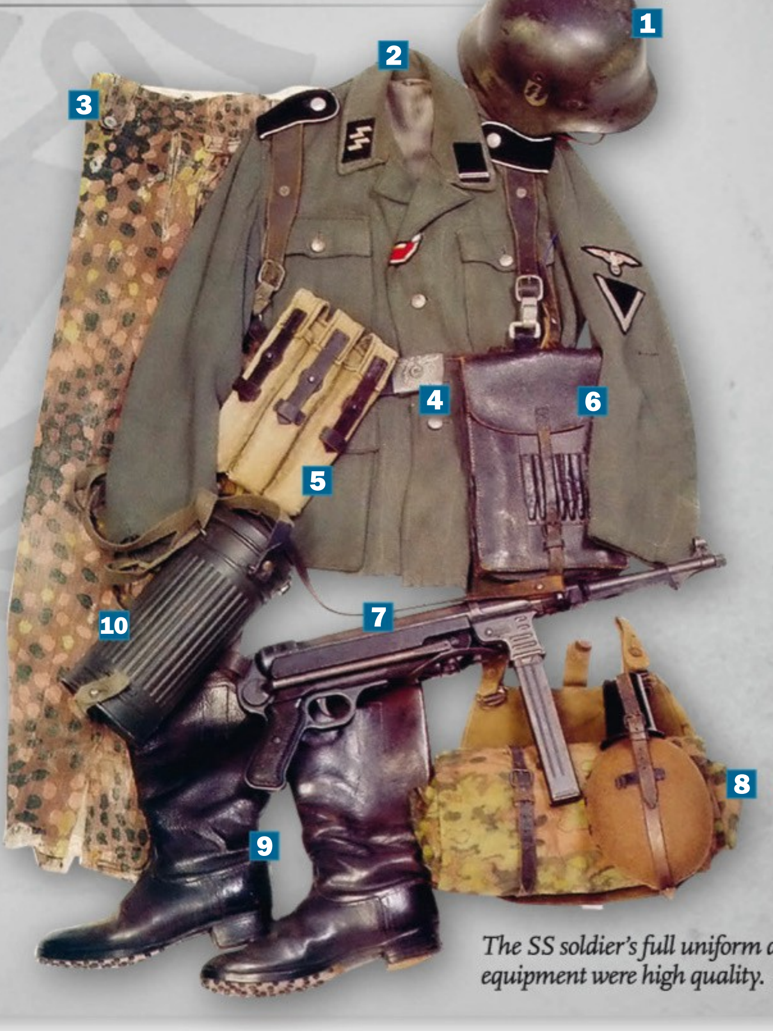
After five days of fighting, the Germans were under pressure. The Allies' supremacy was too great. The line of defence in front of Caen still held, but the units were the worse for wear and armoured reinforcements found it difficult to advance. The 15th Army stood north of the Seine with fresh infantry divisions, but Hitler refused to send them into

SS soldier was ready for gas attack

The young elite soldiers in the Hitler Youth Division were armed with a sub-machine gun and equipped with a gas mask and camouflage trousers, among other kit.

1. **Steel helmet** with SS badge.
2. **Jacket** with SS badge on the collar and logo on the left sleeve. The single silver stripe on the collar indicates the rank of *Sturmmann* (Storm man) – private.
3. **Trousers** in camouflage pattern.
4. **Belt** with logo on the buckle.
5. **Ammunition pouch**.
6. **Bag** for map and compass.
7. **Sub-machine gun,** 9-mm MP 40.
8. **Bag** for bread, water bottle and rain poncho.
9. Long, polished **leather boots**.
10. Case with **gas mask**.

Thousands of boys born in 1926 replaced their Hitler Youth uniform with that of the SS.



The SS soldier's full uniform and equipment were high quality.

battle. The Führer was convinced that D-Day was a ruse to divert attention from a bigger, invasion, and refused to sacrifice resources on the beleaguered forces at Caen. He wanted to keep the 15th Army back until the right moment. With the Führer's decision, the fate of the Hitler Youth Division was sealed. It dug down and prepared to defend Caen to the last. Shallow trenches gradually became fortified positions. Despite almost constant Allied attacks, the young men put up an incredible resistance.

The German field hospitals were quickly filled with the wounded and dying. Friedrich Zistler, a medical officer from the Pioneer Battalion, had been wounded and was lying next to a soldier from the Hitler Youth. The young man had been given morphine and was barely conscious, but he occasionally moaned in pain and mumbled. The doctor was also half-anaesthetised by morphine, but suddenly heard the soldier say clearly: "Mother, mother, but I mean Germany." Before the doctor lost consciousness again, he thought about what those words might mean. When he woke up, the boy was dead.

HOLE PUNCHED IN GERMAN DEFENCES

Untersturmführer Karl-Heinz Gauch started his motorbike and rode across the open countryside. On the way he saw tangled telegraph wires among the bomb craters. Dead cattle lay in the fields, swollen and stinking in the setting sun. He rode through a village that was virtually deserted. Only a few people ventured out on the streets.

It was 25th June and Caen was still holding out. But one town after another in the region was falling, and the Germans' defences had to be patched up. Gauch was sent out to find a battalion that the staff had lost contact with. It was supposed to be at the front, about 10 kilometres outside Caen. Gauch had marked the position of the command post on a map.

When Gauch was almost at his destination, he was suddenly shot. He braked, threw the motorbike down and continued on foot, seeking cover where he could.

The command post was basically a cave, entered via a deep hole. When Gauch landed in the cave with a bump, the sudden movement of air extinguished the lone candle that had been illuminating the cavern. A voice cursed softly in the dark, a match was struck, and the light reappeared. Short of breath, Gauch announced his name and rank, and asked for an explanation as to why the battalion hadn't had been in contact with the rest of the division.

With his lungs struggling to take in enough air, Gauch gasped for breath as he looked around at the assembled officers. The men were unshaven and unwashed, and in the semi-darkness of the cave, their eye sockets looked sunken. The commanding officer, a slender man with raven-black hair, grabbed Gauch's hands and looked at him intently: "Tell *[*Sturmbannführer*]* Gerd he has to help us, help us at all costs. Tell him that we're in real shit! I can hardly cope."

The officer grabbed the map and pointed out a hole in the German lines. "I can't do any more, our losses are too heavy."

His voice was frantic. Occasionally, an explosion above ground made the candle flicker. News continued to stream in: "The commander was wounded." "Short of ammunition." "A tank has been destroyed."

One of the messages caused the black-haired officer to grab the field telephone: "Hold, hold, hold, hold at all costs!" he almost screamed down the line, his voice breaking. Gauch had seen enough and got up to go. "Do not forget, Gauch. Don't forget to pass this on to Gerd, my friend," the officer insisted.

The following day, the battalion was forced back from its post. The Allies knew that Hitler had finally released reinforcements for the region and that a few powerful armoured divisions were on the way, so they made every effort to take Caen before the reinforcements arrived. What Gauch had witnessed was simply the result of the initial manoeuvres of a major Allied offensive.

Circa 15,000

Caen residents sought refuge in quarry tunnels south of the city. They lived there for a month while the fighting raged. The battle left 70 percent of the city in ruins.

ALLIED TANKS ARRIVED

Hundreds of Sherman tanks forged forward. Codenamed Epsom, the Allied offensive was in full swing, destroying everything in its path. As the Allied tanks reached the city of St Manvieu, the Germans knew the situation was critical. If the tanks cut through the park, where the Germans had a command post, they would be able to capture a bridge that was still intact and roll straight on to the road to Caen. It would be a total disaster.

Wool hat worn by the boys from the Hitler Youth who served as anti-aircraft crew.

In the park, the Germans had gathered all the resources they'd could – even office workers had stepped into position between the trees as the first lone Sherman tank rolled towards the park entrance, where it stopped. "That tank has to go!" ordered the German commander.

Emil Dürr, a 24-year-old Unterscharführer in the Hitler Youth Division, heard the order but didn't send his boys forward. He went himself. He quickly grabbed an anti-tank rocket and ran towards the tank. He fired the rocket at close range, but it bounced off the vehicle's armour. Just then, Dürr was hit in the chest by a machine-gun bullet. He ignored the pain and ran back for another anti-tank rocket. This time, he directed it at the caterpillar tracks, which were ripped apart by the explosion. The tank had been stopped, but not rendered harmless. Again, a machine-gun salvo blasted out, knocking Dürr's legs out from under him. This time, he had to crawl back to his trench, where he grabbed a magnetic charge. "You're already bleeding…" someone shouted after him, but Dürr didn't care. He stumbled towards the tank as bullets flew around him. He reached out and placed the charge on the tank, then staggered back. The charge exploded and the tank was engulfed in flames. With one last effort, Dürr

More than 2,200 German soldiers from the Hitler Youth division ended up in Allied captivity during the Battle for Caen. Many of the POWs were wounded.

dragged himself back, and a couple of his soldiers made him lie down. Blood gushed from his chest and legs, but he was conscious and his thoughts were clear. He asked for a cigarette and something to rest his head on; he was given a gas mask, the only thing available. Calmly, he smoked the cigarette while stroking the grass with his free hand.

"You must not let them into the park," he said. "Give my love to my wife and the little one. Take care of them. And do not be sad. There is no need to be sad." The cigarette dropped from his hand, and his chest rose and fell one last time.

The end was also approaching for the rest of the Hitler Youth division. The German reinforcements arriving at Caen on 28th June wouldn't be much help, for the Allies would do everything in their power to crush the resistance in the city.

Division fought for remainder of war

For almost a month, Allied troops had tried in vain to capture Caen. Consideration for the civilian population had so far kept them from blasting the city, but on 7th July, their patience ran out and the velvet gloves were taken off. 467 heavy bombers dropped 2,500 tonnes of bombs over Caen, killing 3,000 French civilians and a small number of Germans.

That same evening, German soldier Leo Freund and his comrades sought refuge in a quarry tunnel just outside the city. Above them, the drone of the Allied bombs made the ceiling shake dangerously. While Leo Freund weighed up the pros and cons of taking his chances and running out into the open, a bomb landed just outside the tunnel, triggering a landslide that blocked the exit. The soldiers were buried in an impenetrable, suffocating darkness. One of the men started screaming, but another took control and calmed him down. He explained quietly and matter-of-factly that they should take turns digging. Those who weren't digging should lie completely still without speaking, to preserve the oxygen.

Freund lay motionless on the cold rocks. All sense of time and space disappeared in the darkness. He was convinced that none of them would get out alive. Then there was a shout: "Light!" Fresh air poured in. As the soldiers filled their lungs, they heard their names being called. Helping hands pulled them out, and Freund laughed and cried at the same time, as he threw himself into the arms of his comrades.

On 8th July, major Allied land forces attacked Caen again. And the following day, the commander of the Hitler Youth Division, Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer, withdrew his remaining troops from the bombed-out buildings in the town centre.

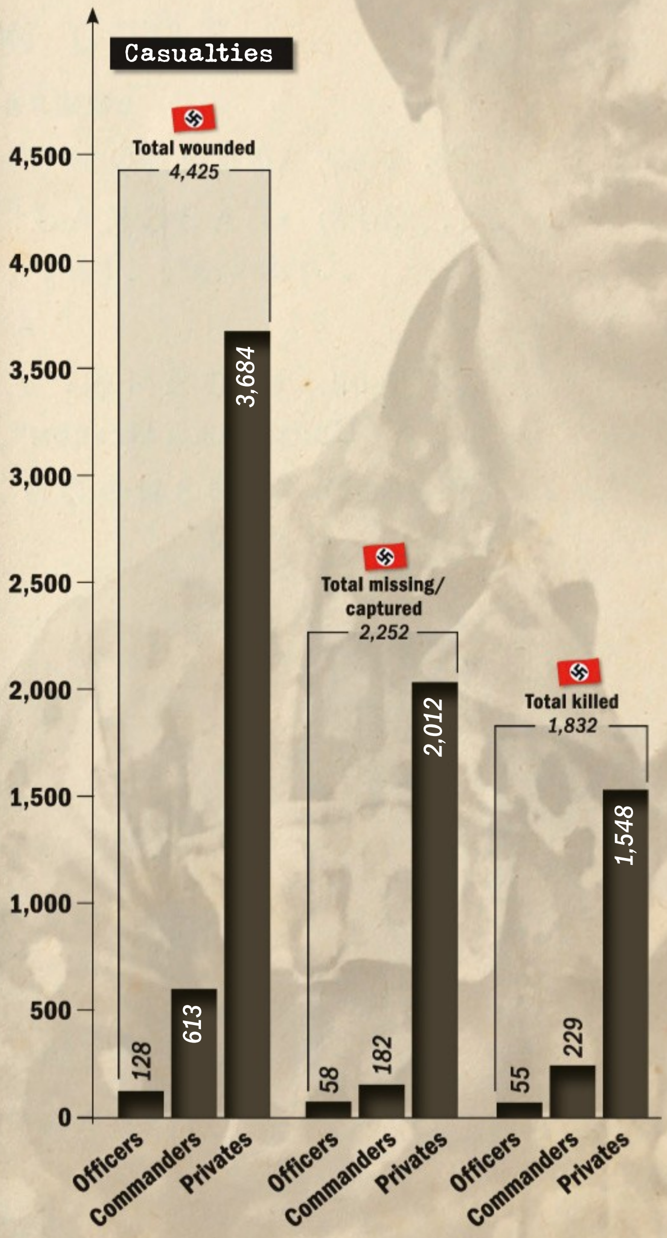
In a fortified position in one of the city's suburbs, Meyer found a group of his soldiers fast sleep. Their faces under the dirty steel helmets looked sunken, older and more ravaged than they should be for boys of that age. They were so exhausted that every single soldier had to be shaken awake. They had been fighting without respite for several weeks, and every last drop of their strength had been drained. But they obeyed the commander's order. The soldiers staggered to their feet and began walking. Tired and unsteady, the marching column passed through the ruins of Caen and out of the city.

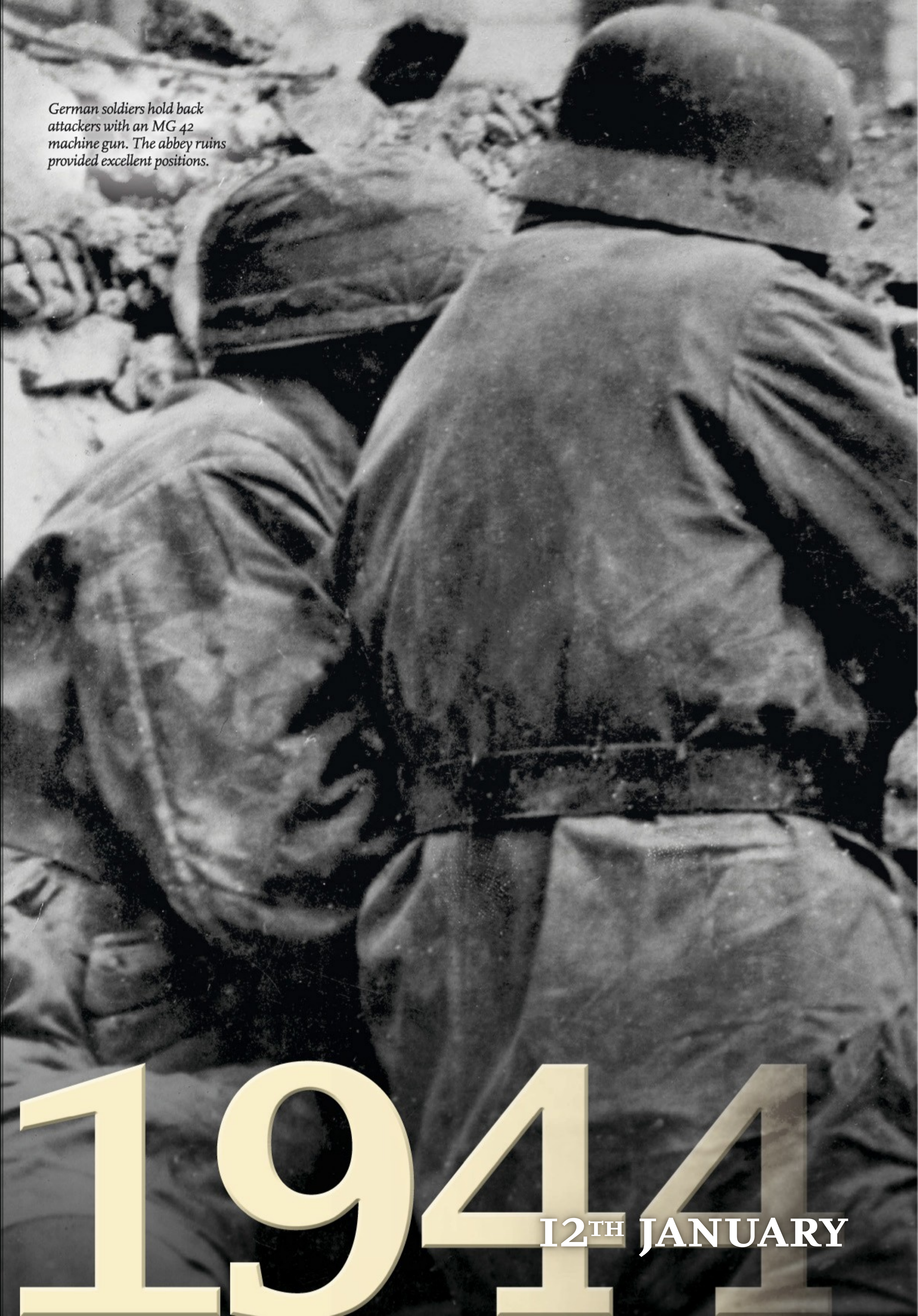
However, the war wasn't over for the exhausted soldiers. Shortly after the Battle for Caen, the Hitler Youth Division was deployed at Falaise, where German forces had been surrounded. The division kept a corridor open so thousands of Germans could escape before the Allies cut them off.

Division was halved during the battle

Before the Battle for Caen, the Hitler Youth division comprised 20,540 soldiers. But after a month of combat, its fighting strength was almost halved.

8,509 killed, wounded and missing/captured

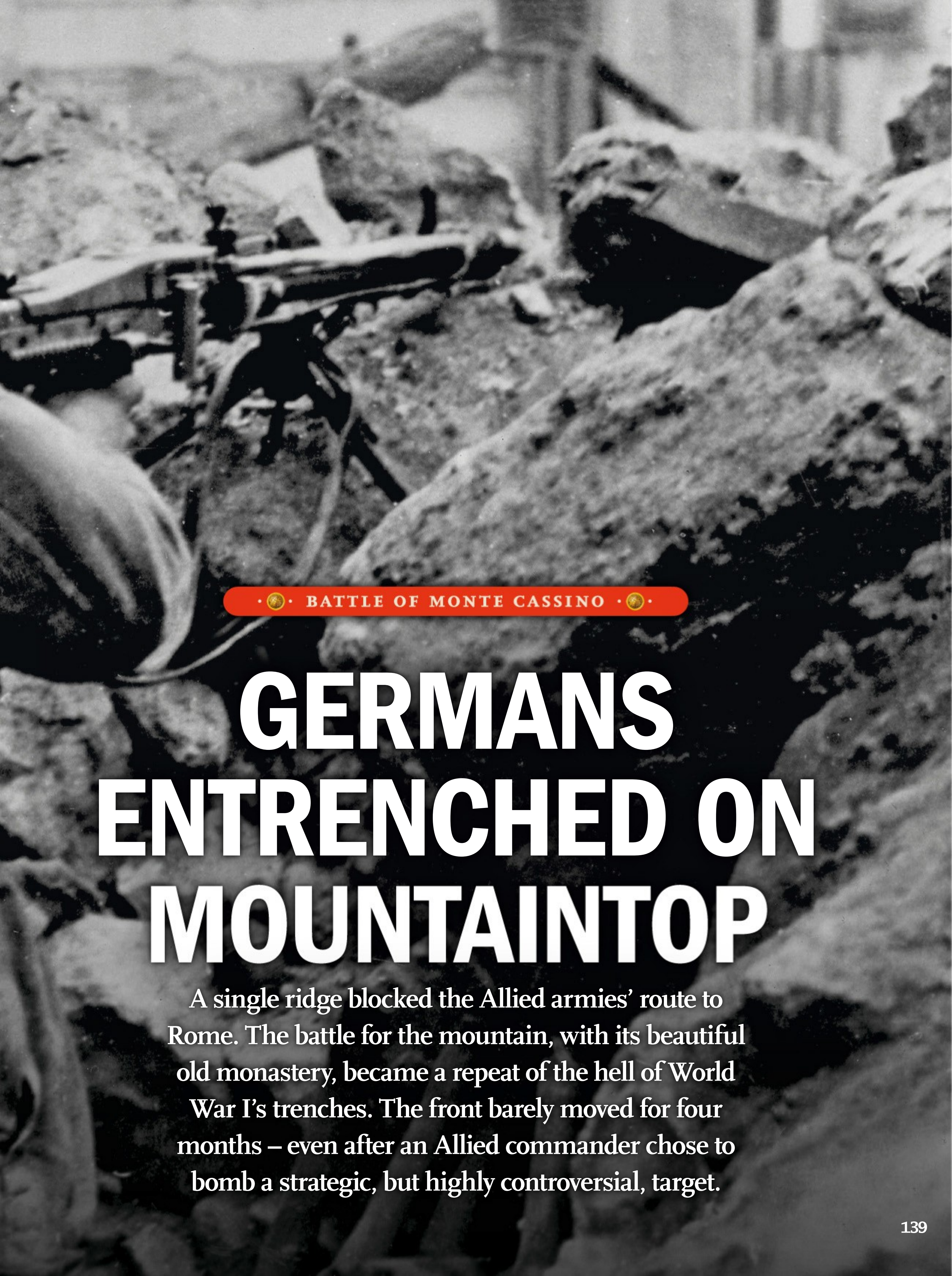




German soldiers hold back attackers with an MG 42 machine gun. The abbey ruins provided excellent positions.

1944

12TH JANUARY



BATTLE OF MONTE CASSINO

GERMANS ENTRENCHED ON MOUNTAINTOP

A single ridge blocked the Allied armies' route to Rome. The battle for the mountain, with its beautiful old monastery, became a repeat of the hell of World War I's trenches. The front barely moved for four months – even after an Allied commander chose to bomb a strategic, but highly controversial, target.

Italy 1944

THE STAGE IS SET

ITALY
CASSINO

The Germans have lost the battle on the Eastern Front, and the Allied invasion of Sicily has overthrown Mussolini's fascist regime. But the British and American forces' march up through the Italian peninsula meets fierce resistance from the Germans. In January, the Allies reach Monte Cassino, which must be captured.

THE EVENING WAS COLD AND AS DULL AS EVER for the German sentries on the slopes outside the city of Cassino, in central Italy. But their boredom was suddenly broken by a nightmarish scene. Without warning, the mountainside was filled with roaring figures storming forward. Higher up, dazed defenders frantically tried to prepare for battle, but it was too late.

On the night of 12th January 1944, Moroccan colonial soldiers from the French Army quickly overran the German outposts. The death-defying North African troops were in their element among the peaks.

"The Moroccan loves the night and the mountains," wrote a proud colonel, Felix Lappara, later. Lappara, who led one of the Moroccan regiments, continued: "Rocks, thickets and sheer crevasses, all observed in the treacherous darkness, are his best allies and over a thousand years his eyes have become accustomed to not losing their way in the gloom. He knows when to creep forward and when to wait."

The Moroccan division was part of the Allied forces, which were making their way north through Italy. The Germans had established several lines of defence, but to reach them, the Allies first had to fight their way through the Apennine Mountains, which divided the Italian peninsula lengthwise.

SOLDIERS FOUGHT NON-STOP FOR FIVE DAYS

Algerian soldiers also fought alongside the Moroccans, and despite the hostile landscape, they advanced rapidly. France's North African soldiers proved why they'd gained a reputation for being among the world's best assault troops.

Soon after, the Germans deployed their own specialists: paratroopers, trained to fight in difficult terrain. The advance grew more arduous, and the Moroccans and Algerians had to fight with hand grenades and bayonets to capture every peak. Meanwhile, commanders on both sides struggled to get an overview of the maelstrom on the cliffs and in the gorges.

"It was no longer even a question of small-unit combat, but rather of one man against another in a terrain in which one could spend hours on end without having any clear idea of what was happening only ten yards from the forward positions," read a report from the Moroccan division.

The battle continued after dawn, and in the following days, the North Africans fought hard to move forward. Finally, on the fifth day, all the designated targets had been captured and the weary soldiers got a well-deserved rest.

Despite their efforts, the offensive had only advanced the front by five kilometres. And the Allies had only managed to reach the German defensive position: the Gustav Line.

The slow progress was nothing new in the protracted Italian campaign. Ever since September

Soldiers had to laboriously drag their equipment up the steep mountainsides by hand.

Tanks had severe problems in the rocky terrain, where stones repeatedly damaged their caterpillar tracks.

1943, when troops from the United States, British Empire and French colonies had landed in southern Italy, the Allies had been slowly moving north. The Germans had blown up all the bridges over gorges in the mountains and destroyed the crossings over the gushing rivers of the lowlands. The narrow roads were blocked by mines, and from the ridges, hidden guns, mortars and machine guns caused constant losses.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring had promised Hitler that he could defend Rome until the summer of 1944. So, Kesselring prepared the Gustav Line – a belt of positions from coast to coast, to force the enemy's offensive to grind to a halt.

The location of the Gustav Line had been chosen with care, because almost the entire width of Italy was covered in mountains at that point. By the Adriatic Sea to the east, there was only a narrow strip of coastal plain, and to the west, the Aurunci Mountains rose from the sea. Between them and the mighty Apennines lay the Liri Valley – the only place where Allied tanks could advance. First, however, they had to cross the Rapido River, and every metre of it was watched from the peaks behind the city of Cassino. From here, the Germans could also direct deadly gunfire at the only usable road to the north.

> **"Not a single man of my original squad is left."**
>
> German soldier from the 90th Panzergrenadier Division

Supreme Allied Commander Harold Alexander was aware that "the road which leads to Rome is long and bristles with thorns", as he wrote. So, instead of breaking through the Gustav Line, Alexander laid out an ambitious plan that would make an attack on the Germans' natural fortress unnecessary: by landing on the coast behind the enemy, he'd give the Germans on the Gustav Line a choice between being surrounded and wiped out, or surrendering. On Saturday 22nd January 1944, the plan was set in motion as boats full of American and British soldiers streamed in towards the coast at Anzio, between the front and Rome. But Kesselring's reserve units were prepared, and German elite forces quickly surrounded the bridgehead. The Allies took too long to break out, and the Anzio operation was a failure.

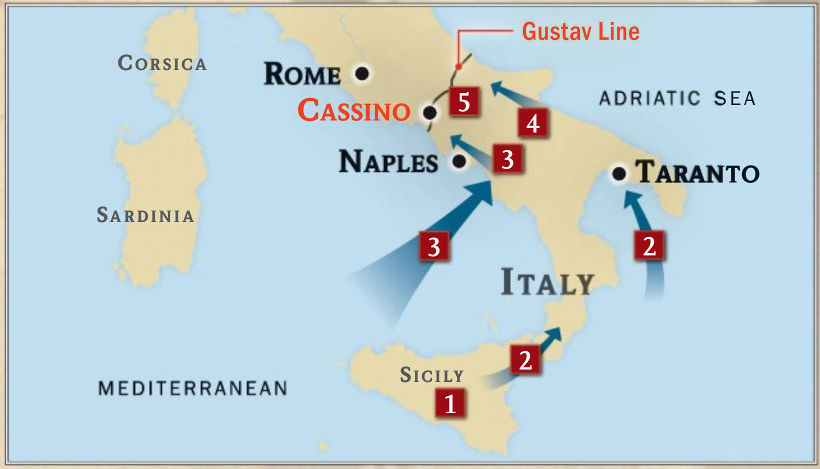
AMERICANS ATTACKED IN VAIN

In parallel with the landing, attacks began at the mouth of the Liri Valley to keep the German forces at the front. The offensive would soon escalate into a real attempt to break through Kesselring's line. Meanwhile, the North Africans of the Free French Forces were again advancing towards the Nazis. But the attack had barely begun when an order to change direction arrived. The colonial troops had to turn south-west to help the Americans, who were trying to capture the city and mountain of Cassino.

The hardy North African soldiers weren't impressed with their allies. And they quickly discovered that the enemy's respect for the American soldiers was just as low: "German... patrols were operating all over no man's land, throwing grenades and shouting insults at us," wrote Sergeant Ahmed Ben Bella, who later became the first president of independent Algeria. "We soon realised, as the insults were all in English, that the Germans

Tough defence is breached

Despite several offensives, the Allies fail to occupy the city of Cassino and the ancient monastery at the top of the mountain. The German resistance holds strong, and it is only on the fourth attempt that the defences are overcome, thanks to Polish soldiers.


Gustav Line
Corsica
Rome
Cassino
Adriatic Sea
Naples
Taranto
Sardinia
Italy
Sicily
Mediterranean
1
2
2
3
3
4
5

Allies make their way up the boot of Italy

1 **Allied forces** occupy Sicily in the summer of 1943.
2 **British Eighth Army** lands at the tip of Italy and Taranto on 3rd September.
3 **US Fifth Army** lands at Salerno and moves up the west coast.
4 **The British** continue the advance along the east coast of Italy.
5 **The Allies** reach the Gustav Line in January 1944.

MONTE CASSINO MAJ 1944

Every Polish soldier who fought at Monte Cassino received a commemorative cross.

5 Monte Cassino falls

18th May at 10.20: With the Germans in retreat, the coast is clear. The Polish victors raise their flag over the abbey ruins in the morning. The cost is 3,800 dead and wounded.

Highway 6 to Rome
LIRI VALLEY
1

German paratroopers defended Monte Cassino. Several Allied generals claimed that no soldier in the world fought harder.

FACTS

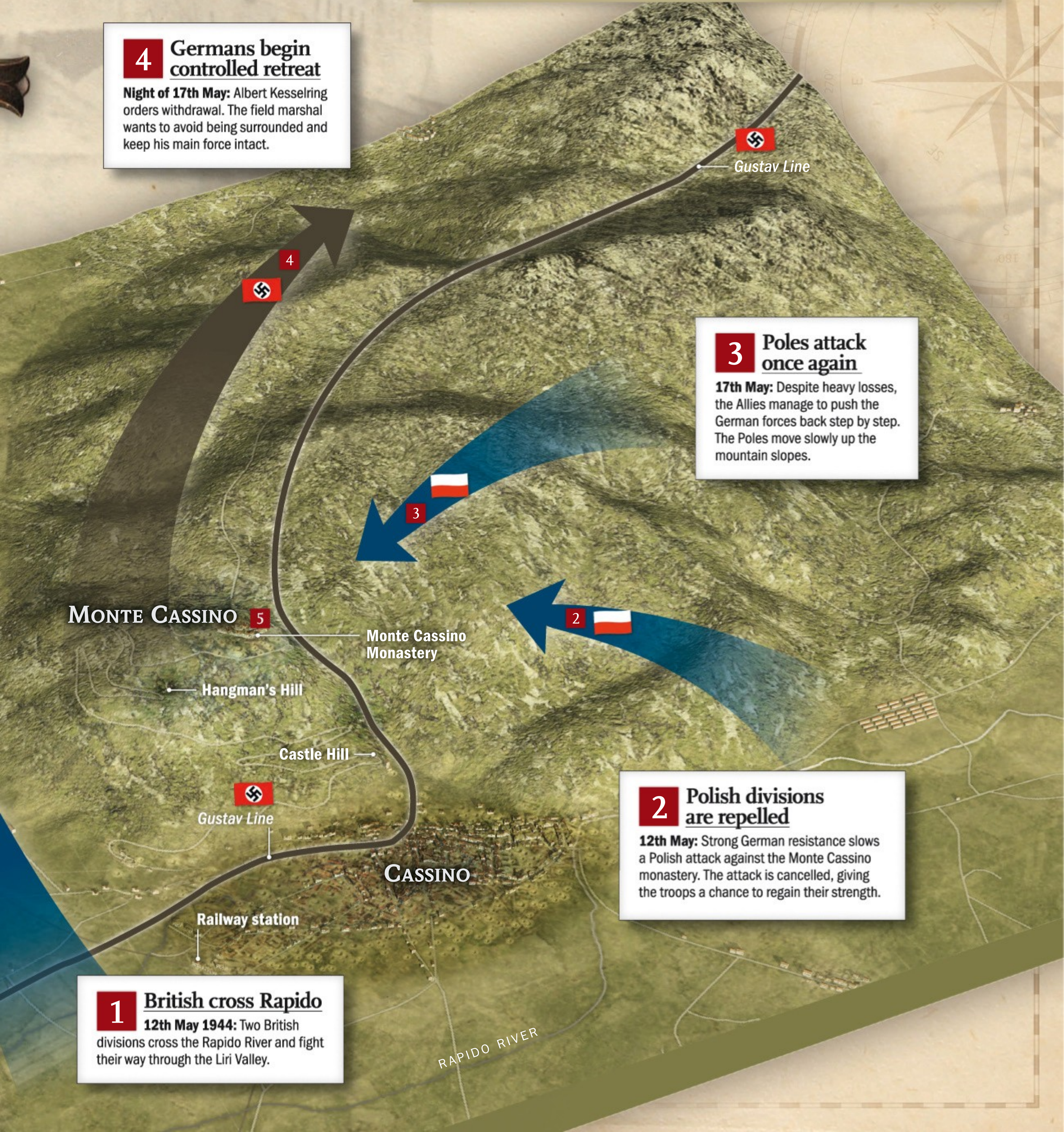
THE WHOLE WORLD FOUGHT THE GERMANS

North Africans: The Free French Forces included troops from the colonies. The Germans had great respect for these soldiers, who fought hard and endured great hardships.

Indians: Three Indian divisions fought in Italy. However, the divisions also had British members, as the Brits hadn't fully trusted the Indians since the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

New Zealanders: The Pacific country had only enough soldiers for one division of around 17,000 men. As well as white soldiers, the troops also included native Maori.

Poles: After Hitler's attack, 55,000 Polish POWs in the Soviet Union were allowed to travel through Iran to join the British. Polish soldiers were the first to reach Monte Cassino.



4 Germans begin controlled retreat

Night of 17th May: Albert Kesselring orders withdrawal. The field marshal wants to avoid being surrounded and keep his main force intact.

3 Poles attack once again

17th May: Despite heavy losses, the Allies manage to push the German forces back step by step. The Poles move slowly up the mountain slopes.

2 Polish divisions are repelled

12th May: Strong German resistance slows a Polish attack against the Monte Cassino monastery. The attack is cancelled, giving the troops a chance to regain their strength.

1 British cross Rapido

12th May 1944: Two British divisions cross the Rapido River and fight their way through the Liri Valley.

thought the Americans were still there. The Americans had hardly sent out any patrols and had not even been able to tell us where the enemy outposts were located."

At the northern edge of Cassino, an American division was trying to cross the Rapido River. But each attack was slowed down by mines and muddy riverbanks, while German machine guns kept battering away. Sergeant Major Billy Kirby described the horror: "We were under constant fire... It was the only scene that I'd seen in the war that lived up to what you see in the movies. I had never seen so many bodies – our own guys. I remember this kid being hit by a machine gun; the bullets hitting him pushed his body along like a tin-can. Just about everybody was hit. I didn't have a single good friend in the company who wasn't killed or wounded."

> "It was no longer even a question of small-unit combat, but…one man against another"
>
> Report from a Moroccan infantry division

The Germans also suffered. A non-commissioned officer from a front-line regiment wrote in his diary: "22 January: I am done. The artillery fire is driving me crazy. I am frightened as never before... During the night one cannot leave one's hole. The last days have finished me off altogether."

After three bloody days, the Allies managed to cross the river. Slowly, the German soldiers were driven up the slopes of Monte Cassino. But although reinforcements were thrown into the fray, the attackers were spent by 12th February. The front line was less than 400 metres from the abbey at on Monte Cassino, but it might as well have been 400 kilometres.

The Allied commanders were frustrated, because the advance towards Rome was unable to get off the ground. A new attack was planned, this time with fresh Indian and New Zealand divisions to replace the Americans.

Prior to the offensive, General Alexander made a controversial decision: he decided to bomb the medieval monastery on Monte Cassino. Until then, the magnificent building had remained undamaged, because the Germans had declared the monastery a neutral zone.

INDIAN OFFICER MISTRUSTED THE GERMANS

With its location on top of the mountain, the monastery could have played a crucial role, with its unobstructed views of the battlefield for miles around, just as batteries placed there could have covered the hillside and made an offensive even more difficult. But Field Marshal Kesselring wanted to save Italy's cultural treasures from the fury of war. The head of the

Soldiers' tug of war with corpse

The battles for Monte Cassino lasted four months and were fought from such close quarters that the soldiers from each side could almost touch each other.

"The Germans are so close that they can reach over and crack my men on the knuckles with a broom," reported an American company commander from the front, where the trenches had to be protected with mesh to keep grenades out. The soldiers always had to be prepared for sudden attacks, and in some places, the environment led to bizarre incidents. For example, British soldiers on the mountain tried to haul a German corpse in from no man's land with a hook on a stick to search his pockets for important documents, while the Germans used signal wire to try to drag the corpse back into their own shelter.

Melee fighting was widespread in the ruins, where German and Allied soldiers fought for almost half a year.

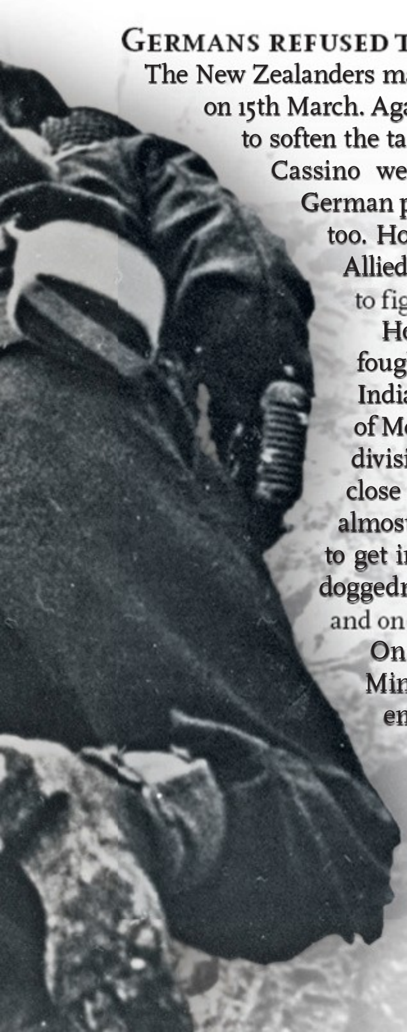
Indian division, however, didn't trust the enemy's guarantees and demanded that the abbey be levelled before sending his men up the hillside. Alexander capitulated – soldiers' lives were more important than bricks and mortar.

On the morning of 15th February, the sky was filled with a swarm of planes. The engine noise was deafening as over 250 Allied bombers flew over Monte Cassino and dropped their bombs on the monastery. The attack was the war's largest Allied air operation to support troops on the ground so far. To a German lieutenant on the mountainside, the detonations felt as though a "huge giant was shaking the town".

Several hundred Italian refugees perished inside the abbey. The Allies had given advance warning of the attack via a leaflet drop, but the people within didn't believe the bombing raid would actually happen. In the days that followed, German radio indignantly protested against the Allies' action: "The Abbey Monte Cassino is completely destroyed. A senseless act of force of the Anglo-American Air Force has robbed civilised mankind of one of its most valued cultural monuments."

Strategically, the bombing was a failure. Sure, German units near the monastery suffered significant losses, but the Indian division wasn't ready to attack until two days later. And as the soldiers began to climb the slopes on 17th February, they were met by deadly gunfire from the ruins that the Germans now occupied. The rubble proved to be excellent cover for the German machine-gun positions.

After catastrophic losses, the troops were ordered to halt the attack the following day. The few gains in terrain the soldiers had achieved had to be abandoned, because they had no cover against the Germans' weapons. Down in Cassino, the New Zealanders' attack had also failed, and the offensive was halted to avoid sacrificing any more soldiers.



GERMANS REFUSED TO GIVE IN

The New Zealanders made a fresh attempt a month later, on 15th March. Again, heavy bombers were deployed to soften the target. The old houses in the city of Cassino were reduced to rubble, and the German paratroopers suffered heavy losses, too. However, the ruins also blocked the Allied tanks' passage, so the infantry had to fight alone.

House by house, the New Zealanders fought their way into the city, while the Indians slowly advanced on the slopes of Monte Cassino. But even though the division's cool-headed Nepalese got so close to the monastery that they could almost touch the walls, it was impossible to get inside. The German paratroopers' doggedness halted the Allies in Cassino and on the mountain.

On 20th March, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, sent an enquiring telegram to Alexander:

"I wish you would explain to me why this passage by Cassino, monastery, hill, etc, all on a front of two or three miles, is the only place which you must keep butting at. About five or six divisions have been worn out going into these jaws."

NAME
ALBERT KESSELRING
1885-1960

TITLE FIELD MARSHAL

Smiling Albert was the master of defence

The campaign in Italy became a real trial for the Allies, first and foremost thanks to Albert Kesselring, who repeatedly established lines of defence that were almost impossible to defeat. At the same time, Smiling Albert, as he was known, made a great effort to preserve Italy's cultural gems. After the war, Churchill was among those who protested against his death sentence.

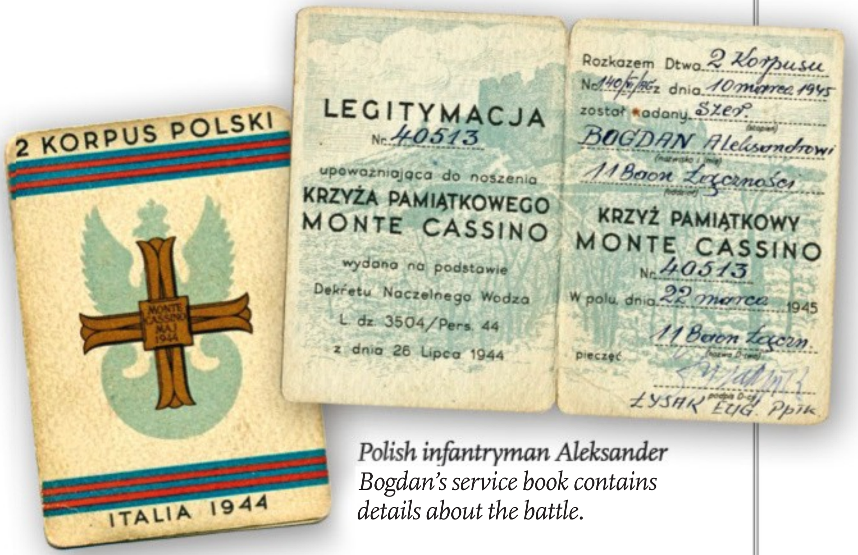
- **Tried to protect historic Italian cities.**
- **Sentenced to death for war crimes, but pardoned.**

In his reply, Alexander explained the strategic importance of Monte Cassino, but also admitted that the Allies had been surprised by the strength of the defence: "The tenacity of these German paratroops is quite remarkable, considering that they were subjected to the whole of the Mediterranean Air Force plus the better part of 800 guns under the greatest concentration of firepower which has ever been put down and lasting six hours. I doubt if there are any other troops in the world who could have stood up to it and then gone on fighting with the ferocity they have."

The general, however, heeded Churchill's advice, and the offensive was called off. Instead, Alexander began to plan a push across a broader front in May.

Meanwhile, the Allied troops dug themselves into their new positions, and some sort of everyday routine was established – marked by the endless thunder of artillery and constant small battles. For the soldiers on both sides of the front, spring 1944 brought only endless suffering and loss.

"What we are going through here is beyond description. I have never experienced anything like this in Russia, not even a second's peace, only the dreadful thunder of



2 KORPUS POLSKI

MONTE CASSINO MAJ 1944

ITALIA 1944

LEGITYMACJA
Nr. 40513
upoważniająca do noszenia
KRZYŻA PAMIĄTKOWEGO
MONTE CASSINO
wydana na podstawie
Dekretu Naczelnego Wodza
L. dz. 3504/Pers. 44
z dnia 26 Lipca 1944

Rozkazem Dtwa. 2 Korpusu
Nr. 140/Pers/46 z dnia 10 marca 1945
został nadany Szer.
(stopień)
BOGDAN Aleksandrowi
(nazwisko i imię)
11 Baon Łączności
(oddział)
KRZYŻ PAMIĄTKOWY
MONTE CASSINO
Nr. 40513
W polu, dnia 22 marca 1945
11 Baon Łączn.
(nazwa D-cy)
pieczęć
podpis D-cy
ŁYSAK EUG. Ppłk

Polish infantryman Aleksander Bogdan's service book contains details about the battle.

“The scene…lived up to what you see in the movies. I had never seen so many bodies”

Billy Kirby, American sergeant major

British artillerymen fire 40-millimetre mortars at German positions at the end of the battle.

guns and mortars… Here we have nothing but terror and horror, death and damnation,” wrote a German private.

The short distance between the sides meant that the only safe places were foxholes or basements beneath the ruins. As soon as the soldiers left their hiding places, their lives were in danger. “On the way to Company HQ, a distance of less than 200 metres, there are at least 20 German dead – how it happened is all too evident,” a German soldier in Cassino reported. “[The Tommies’] snipers shoot only too well. Again and again head wounds. The mortars fire and the whistle and explosion of shells goes on, day and night. Sometimes, for a moment or two only, there is peace, and then I think of home.”

The Allies also suffered constant losses from shells and mines. In the months running up to the action at the Gustav Line, German engineering troops had had plenty of time to fill the ground with explosives, and the minefields were a constant danger. The terrain also made everyday life difficult: “It took a laden man 4.5 hours to climb to the Battalion area. All water, ammunition and rations had to be carried by hand, as the route was impassable to mules,” a British regiment’s war diary recorded.

FRESH TROOPS WON BATTLE

Fatigue was spreading among the soldiers, but the Allies had an advantage – General Alexander was able to replace his exhausted troops. Ahead of the fourth offensive in May, front-line troops at Monte Cassino were relieved by fully-rested Poles and Britons. Forces were also moved from the east coast, so Alexander had 25 divisions and 11 brigades available in the west.

Kesselring didn’t have the same luck, because the German army in Italy was being pushed to breaking point. The field marshal could only muster nine divisions, so the paratroopers had to remain at their post at Monte Cassino.

“Not a single man of my original squad is left,” wrote a German soldier home to his father in Germany. “It seems to be the same in the entire company.”

Code-named Operation Diadem, the fourth battle of Monte Cassino began on 12th May. Just before dawn, two Polish divisions set off towards the monastery. The Poles were both rested and far superior in number to their German opponents.

As with the previous attacks, the paratroopers responded with machine-gun salvos. The German positions at the top of the mountain were strong, and wounded soldiers flocked to the hospitals behind the front. “Some crawled to us on their own, others were helped by friends, others were slung over shoulders like sacks,” recalled a field doctor called Majewski.

Despite the fierce attacks, the offensive stalled. Like other Allied forces before them, the Poles realised that the Germans’ position on Monte Cassino was too strong. The attack was interrupted, in the hope that an opportunity would arise. It did, five days later. Again, it was the soldiers from France’s North African colonies who paved the way for the Allies. On the westernmost part of the front, the men broke through the German defences so that British divisions were able to advance into the Liri Valley, and the entire Gustav Line faltered. The Poles took advantage and went on the offensive once more. Again, the German paratroopers' defences were strong, but from their positions at the top of Monte Cassino, the soldiers could see the British forces making their way through the Liri Valley. The prospect of being surrounded caused the defences to crumble. Finally, Polish soldiers were able to storm the monastery and Monte Cassino fell.

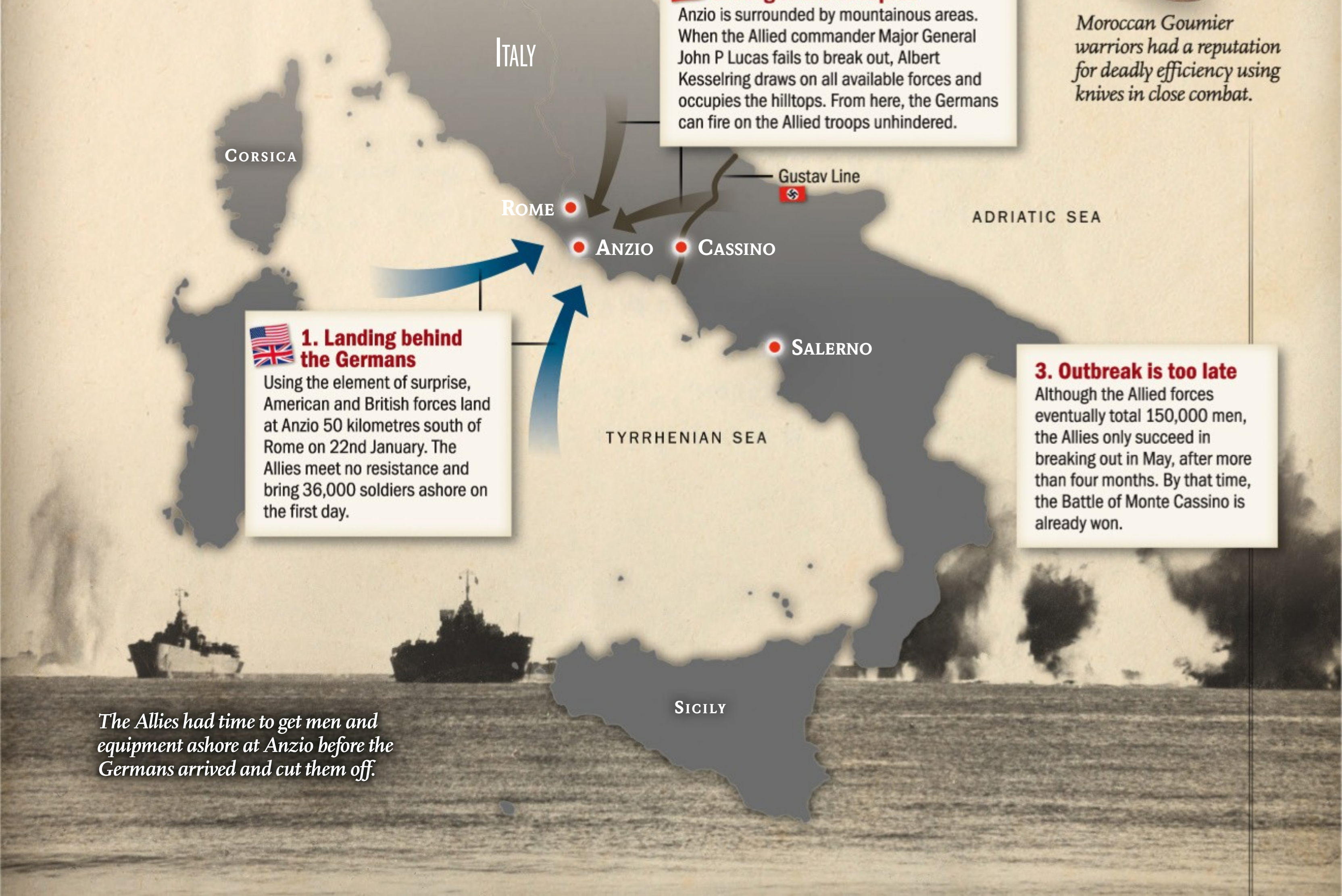
On 17th May, Field Marshal Kesselring finally abandoned the Gustav Line, fearing that all his divisions would be surrounded. While the British were invading the Liri Valley, Allied forces broke out of the bridgehead at Anzio, where they'd arrived four months earlier. The Allies still had a chance to capture Kesselring's forces, but instead the divisions from Anzio set course for Rome to win the honour of being the first Allies in the Eternal City. Kesselring's divisions escaped and established a new line of defence further north.

The battle for Monte Cassino cost more than 75,000 dead and wounded soldiers, and the survivors were forever scarred psychologically. In an Allied prisoner of war camp, German Sergeant Richard Kruppa forbade his men to mention the battle: "Speak about women, but not about Cassino!"

Advance behind front progresses too slowly

The Allies want to bypass the German Gustav Line by landing behind the front. The invasion is successful, but the commander is slow to break out of the bridgehead. By the time he is ready, the Germans have managed to get reinforcements to the area.

Moroccan Goumier warriors had a reputation for deadly efficiency using knives in close combat.



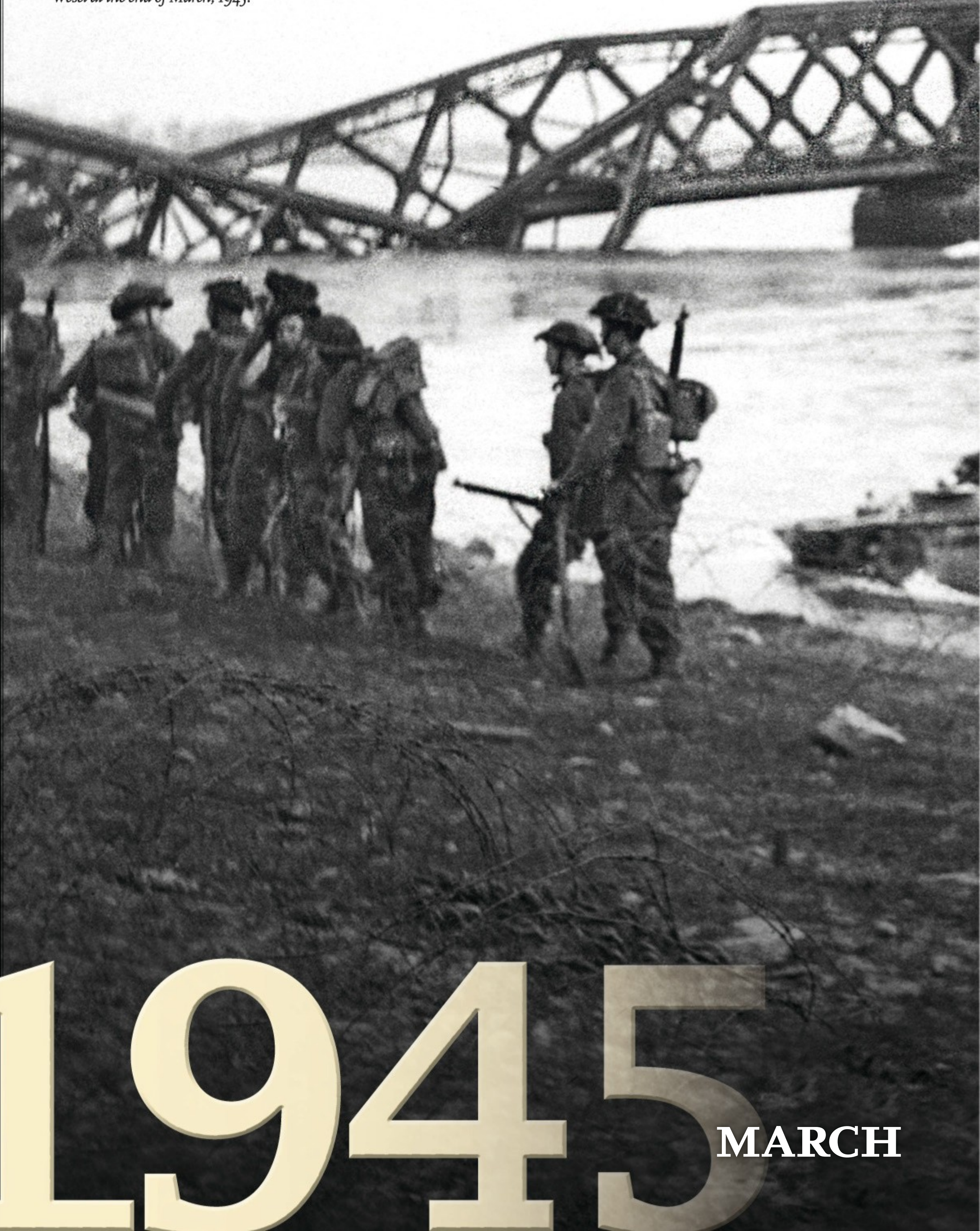
2. Ridges are occupied
Anzio is surrounded by mountainous areas. When the Allied commander Major General John P Lucas fails to break out, Albert Kesselring draws on all available forces and occupies the hilltops. From here, the Germans can fire on the Allied troops unhindered.

1. Landing behind the Germans
Using the element of surprise, American and British forces land at Anzio 50 kilometres south of Rome on 22nd January. The Allies meet no resistance and bring 36,000 soldiers ashore on the first day.

3. Outbreak is too late
Although the Allied forces eventually total 150,000 men, the Allies only succeed in breaking out in May, after more than four months. By that time, the Battle of Monte Cassino is already won.

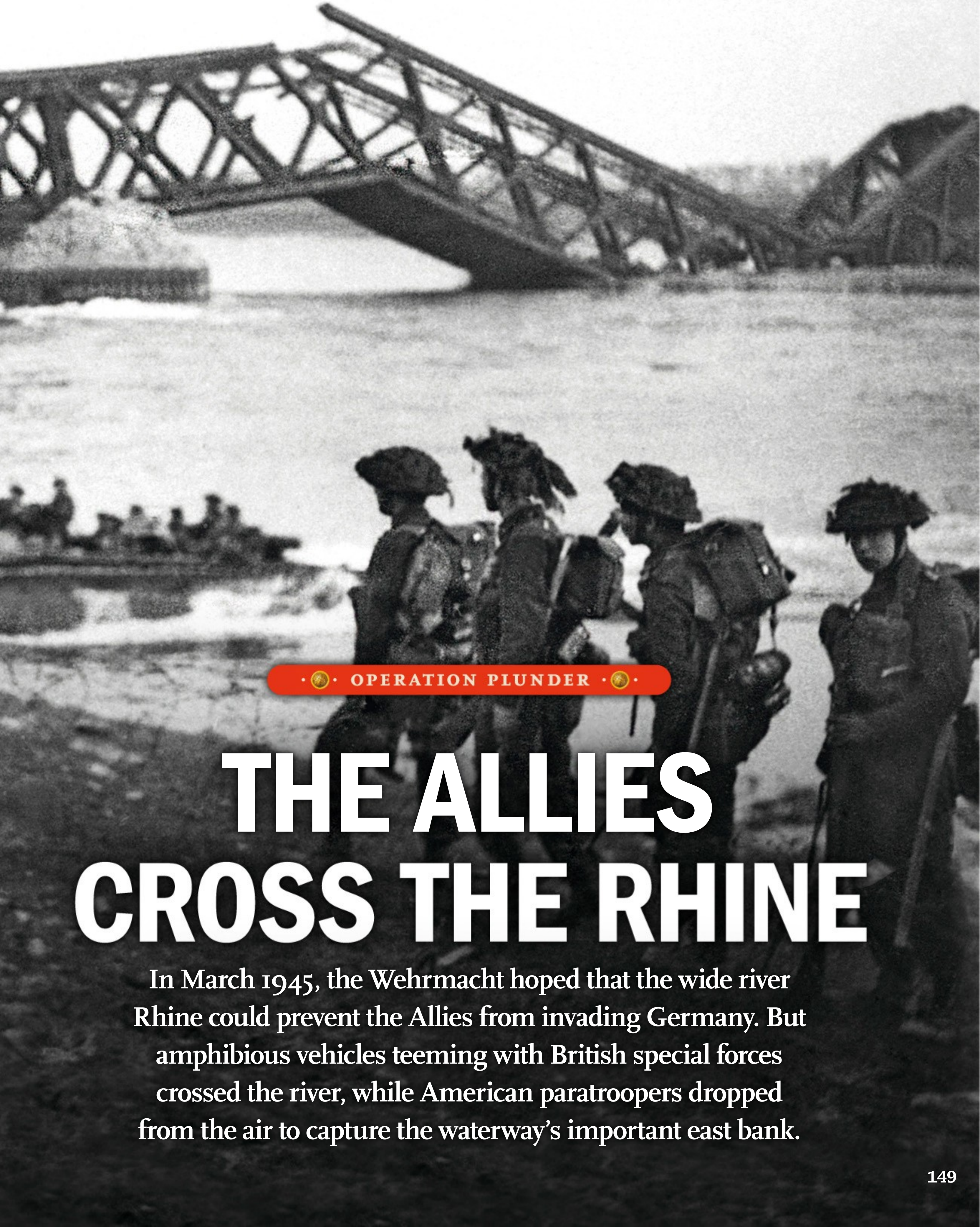
The Allies had time to get men and equipment ashore at Anzio before the Germans arrived and cut them off.

British Commandos took the lead when the Allies forced their way across the Rhine to take the city of Wesel at the end of March, 1945.



1945

MARCH



OPERATION PLUNDER

THE ALLIES CROSS THE RHINE

In March 1945, the Wehrmacht hoped that the wide river Rhine could prevent the Allies from invading Germany. But amphibious vehicles teeming with British special forces crossed the river, while American paratroopers dropped from the air to capture the waterway's important east bank.

Germany, 1945

THE STAGE IS SET

For months, the Allies have pushed the beaten German army back to the Third Reich's borders, and in the spring of 1945 the Wehrmacht are entrenched behind Germany's last natural western defence: the Rhine. Hitler knows that the rest of the Reich and Berlin are sitting ducks if the British and the Americans cross the river.

As darkness fell on 23rd March, 1945, rows of Buffalo amphibious craft rolled out of hiding on the west side of the Rhine. Purposefully, the Buffalo commanders directed the craft towards the river bank. At the same time, powerful guns fired deafening shells against the far bank, so the Germans couldn't hear the noise coming from the many vehicles.

From his observation post, Lieutenant General Brian Horrocks watched the several hundred Buffalo, all filled with British soldiers. Horrocks' troops made up the northernmost force of the large allied Rhine offensive, and during that night they had to cross the river and attack the city of Rees.

At 21.00, the first tranche of Buffalo entered the Rhine and sailed at full throttle – around 10 km/h – towards the enemy on the far bank. In the stern of the floating tanks, the soldiers held their rifles tightly. Although their faces were painted black and they were wore camouflage, they felt vulnerable on the glistening river.

"It was pitch black... We couldn't see and had no idea what to expect... It was an extremely nerve-wracking crossing", recalled a private who was part of the first attack wave.

Suddenly, rounds of machine gun fire pounded against some of amphibious vehicles' armour, forcing the men to protect themselves as best they could. Gunners on the Buffalo were equally eager to retaliate with their 14 mm machine guns, but the British troops sighed with relief when their tanks were moving up the steep slopes of the east bank. Here soldiers quickly jumped out of the Buffaloes' back doors to take cover.

Uniform badge for the 21st Army Group that conducted Operation Plunder.

The bombardment that began the offensive had pared down enemy positions along the Rhine. The Germans' machine gun volleys from the east bank were sporadic and there few casualties among Allied soldiers along Horrocks' offensive line.

"The Black Watch has landed safely on the far bank", Horrocks heard at 04.21, when he received the first positive radio message from the Scottish unit. The vanguard had crossed the Rhine – the Germans' last great natural line of defence before Berlin. But Horrocks' troops feared that the Wehrmacht would do anything to block their continued advance eastwards.

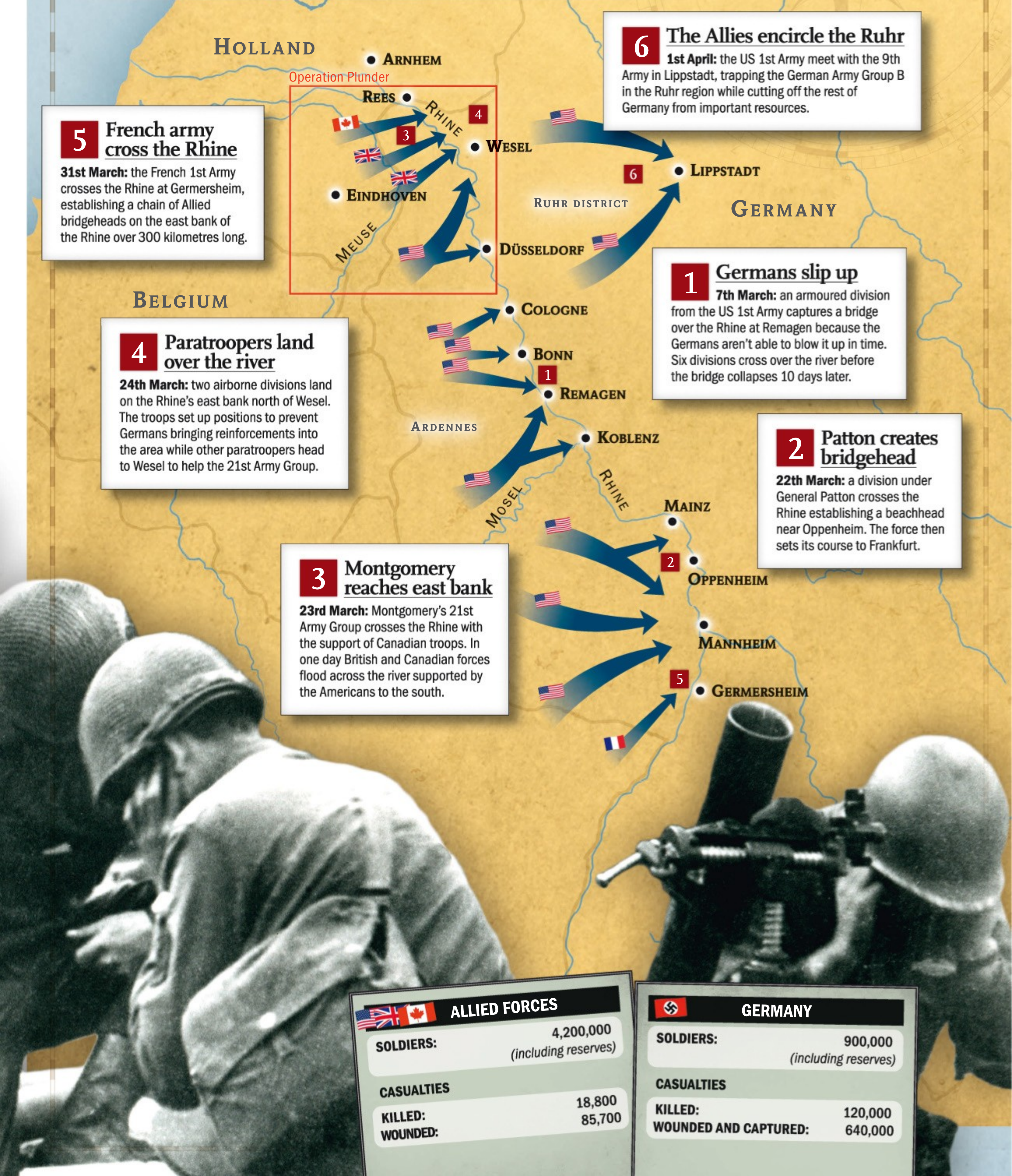
Americans crossed the Rhine

In January, prior to the Rhine offensive and the attack against Rees, the Allies had regained the ground they lost during Hitler's Ardennes offensive. After fierce battles along the fortified Siegfried Line on the western German border, Britons, Canadians, Frenchmen and Americans advanced towards the Rhine, while bombers destroyed major German cities. In March, ground forces stood along the whole of the river's west bank, and now it was up to the

A mortar attack on the Rhine's east bank weakened the enemy before the river crossing.

Offensive choked German Industry

During the Rhine offensive, Western powers surrounded the Third Reich's most important industrial region – the Ruhr – to prevent the Wehrmacht from receiving much-needed resources. Thus the Allies cut off the last supplies for Hitler's ailing war machine.


HOLLAND
ARNHEM
Operation Plunder
REES
RHINE
4
3
WESEL
EINDHOVEN
MEUSE
DÜSSELDORF
6
LIPPSTADT
RUHR DISTRICT
GERMANY
BELGIUM
COLOGNE
BONN
1
REMAGEN
ARDENNES
KOBLENZ
RHINE
MOSEL
MAINZ
2
OPPENHEIM
MANNHEIM
5
GERMERSHEIM

6 The Allies encircle the Ruhr

1st April: the US 1st Army meet with the 9th Army in Lippstadt, trapping the German Army Group B in the Ruhr region while cutting off the rest of Germany from important resources.

5 French army cross the Rhine

31st March: the French 1st Army crosses the Rhine at Germersheim, establishing a chain of Allied bridgeheads on the east bank of the Rhine over 300 kilometres long.

1 Germans slip up

7th March: an armoured division from the US 1st Army captures a bridge over the Rhine at Remagen because the Germans aren't able to blow it up in time. Six divisions cross over the river before the bridge collapses 10 days later.

4 Paratroopers land over the river

24th March: two airborne divisions land on the Rhine's east bank north of Wesel. The troops set up positions to prevent Germans bringing reinforcements into the area while other paratroopers head to Wesel to help the 21st Army Group.

2 Patton creates bridgehead

22th March: a division under General Patton crosses the Rhine establishing a beachhead near Oppenheim. The force then sets its course to Frankfurt.

3 Montgomery reaches east bank

23rd March: Montgomery's 21st Army Group crosses the Rhine with the support of Canadian troops. In one day British and Canadian forces flood across the river supported by the Americans to the south.

ALLIED FORCES

SOLDIERS:	4,200,000 *(including reserves)*
CASUALTIES	
KILLED:	18,800
WOUNDED:	85,700

GERMANY

SOLDIERS:	900,000 *(including reserves)*
CASUALTIES	
KILLED:	120,000
WOUNDED AND CAPTURED:	640,000

senior officers to decide how the troops would cross the big river. The Rhine's strong currents and width of up to 500 metres complicated matters. Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery and General Dwight D Eisenhower could not attack in as many places as they would have liked. Eventually the commanders planned the main attack in the northern part of the Rhine, where Montgomery's 21st Army Group had moved into position.

During the so-called Operation Plunder, the field marshal's Anglo-Canadian force, with the help of the US 9th Army under General William Simpson, would cross the Rhine north of Cologne near the towns of Rees and Wesel. From there they would head towards the German heavy industrial stronghold in the Ruhr region. The loss of the Ruhr would further strangle Hitler's already ailing war machine.

Adolf Hitler fired Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt after the failed blasting of a bridge over the Rhine at Remagen. The soldiers tasked with blowing the bridge up were executed.

Eisenhower's forces with Omar Bradley and George S Patton in command would cross the Rhine River south of the Ruhr, to besiege the heavily fortified industrial area. Expectations of a rapid advance were limited, but on 7th March, the Wehrmacht committed a gigantic blunder when a team of German explosives experts failed in an attempt to destroy a bridge at the town of Remagen. A group of American soldiers raced across the bridge to the other side squeezing the enemy forces back. "Brad, that's wonderful", exclaimed Eisenhower after Bradley conveyed the good news.

Patton drew on his experience from WWI when he fought against Hitler 25 years later.

Eisenhower now had a bridgehead on the east side of the Rhine, and the Americans moved six divisions across before the bridge collapsed 10 days later because the Germans failed blasting had at least weakened its foundations. But as the Americans already stood on the east bank and had established pontoon bridges, they could continue to bring their forces across the river.

SMOKESCREEN SHIELDED SOLDIERS

While the Americans had successfully crossed the Rhine at Remagen, Montgomery continued preparations for the northern crossing. Each night, convoys of trucks drove to the Rhine fully loaded with supplies, weapons, material for pontoons and endless supplies of ammunition. All lights were forbidden for the last kilometre before the river, and all transport and amphibious craft followed white ribbons that the advance guard had neatly laid out. The white ribbon ensured that more than 200,000 tons of supplies were distributed to Operation Plunder's 80,000 soldiers, including seven Canadian regiments and the British.

"The hedgerows were lined and the barns bursting with supplies and ammunition. Other shell dumps were camouflaged as false haystacks. The woods were bristling with tanks", said a British lieutenant who was "overwhelmed by the rapidly massing material for the river crossing".

From 16th March, the British advance guard set up smoke screens along the west bank using smoke cannons and

1885-1945

NAME **GEORGE S PATTON**

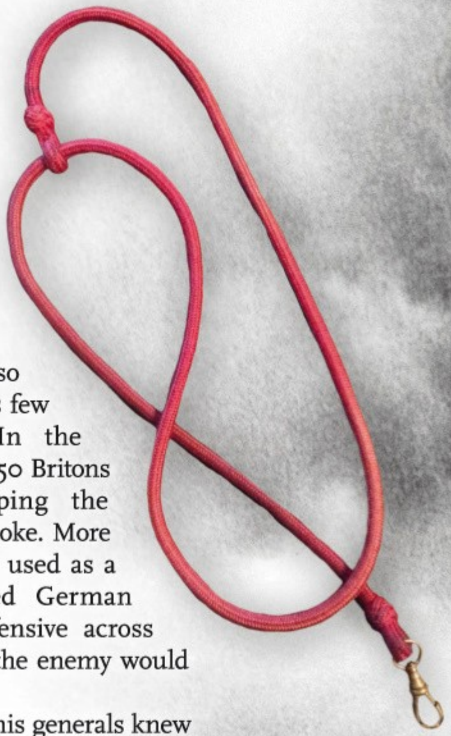
TITLE GENERAL, COMMANDER UNITED STATES 3RD ARMY

War hero killed in traffic accident

General George S Patton, who was known for his charismatic and direct manner, took part in some of the war's major battles and operations in both Africa and Europe. The general led US troops during the Allied landings in North Africa in 1942 and Sicily in 1943. In addition, he participated in both counterattacking the German Ardennes Offensive and the Allied Rhine Offensive in 1945.

After the war in Europe ended, the general wanted to be transferred to the Pacific war. Instead, Patton was appointed military governor of Bavaria, where he spearheaded the denazification process. But in December 1945 the governor was killed after a car accident.

- **Participated in the Olympic Games in 1912.**
- **Was wounded in the left thigh during WWI.**



Canadian officers wore a whistle on a red string, which was used to provide signals to the troops during combat.

grenades to hide the operation's daylight preparations. Soon wafts of blue and yellow smoke filled the sky, blocking the Wehrmacht's view of the far side and also hiding the operation from the Luftwaffe's few remaining reconnaissance aircraft. In the week leading up to the attack, a total of 1,350 Britons were constantly occupied with keeping the 100-kilometre-wide front shrouded in smoke. More than a million litres of smoke fluid was used as a smokescreen, which naturally aroused German suspicions of an imminent Allied offensive across the Rhine. But exactly where and when the enemy would strike, they had no idea.

For a long time, only Montgomery and his generals knew the details of Operation Plunder – three offensives designed to establish a bridgehead between the cities of Rees and Wesel. However, at a meeting on 18th March, war correspondents were presented with the operating plans by General Miles Dempsey, who would himself led one of the offensives. The journalists listened attentively to his detailed presentation, which also announced that two airborne divisions would drop into the hinterland after the attack and block the Germans' ability to call in reinforcements.

"This might well be the last battle?" asked journalist, Alan Moorehead. "Yes", was Dempsey's emphatic reply.

The night before the Plunder offensive, the soldiers from 21st Army Group checked weapons and supplies a second time, while the Americans to the south managed to cross the Rhine. This time, it was General Patton's 3rd Army that had found a narrow spot in the river near the town of Oppenheim where there was almost no enemies waiting on the far bank. With no previous smokescreen, air support or artillery, Patton's men attacked at 22.00 in boats and amphibious craft.

The army's 7,500 military engineers began to build pontoons during the night, and the next day – 23rd March – Patton walked on to one of the bridges, while several of his soldiers immortalised the moment with their cameras. The general stopped in the middle of the bridge, unbuttoned his flies and sent a long, high stream of urine into the Rhine.

"I've waited a long time to do that. I didn't even piss this morning when I got up, so that I would have a really full load. Yes sir, the pause that refreshes", Patton proudly commented.

Actually, the general believed that for security reasons, the 3rd Army's crossing did not need to be officially reported. But on the afternoon of 23rd, Patton had control over the beachhead, and in his eagerness to outdo his rival Montgomery and the British forces, he called General Bradley:

"Brad, for God's sake, tell the world that we are across. We knocked down 33 Krauts [aircraft] today when they came after our pontoon bridges. I want the world to know 3rd Army made it before Monty starts across".

THE BRITISH WERE OPPOSED IN REES

The two successful American Rhine crossings left the British "behind" in the unofficial Allied race.

»

Smoke cannons fired a smokescreen along a 100-kilometre front to mask Allied preparations.

American soldiers huddle in a landing boat to avoid fierce German fire from the eastern bank of the Rhine.

The badge of the British Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who participated in Operation Plunder.

Lieutenant General Horrocks breathed a sigh of relief when, on 23rd March at 21.04, he received notification that the British Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) had crossed the river just north of Rees. But even though reports over the scratchy radio claimed that there were only 40 killed and nine lost Buffalo craft in the first hour, Horrocks later learned that his troops ran into more violent fighting as soldiers approached their attack target of Rees.

“[It was] bad luck that once more we should be faced by these diehard Nazis”, Horrocks later wrote. “We heard stories, from US and our flanking corps, of German soldiers surrendering in their thousands… while we had to fight hard right up to the end”.

The general’s troops crossed the flat, open areas towards Rees under minimal German shelling. But when the British reached the first houses in the city, they realised that the Wehrmacht would not surrender without a fight.

German snipers with rifles shot at the advancing soldiers from Rees’ cathedral and mill tower. The British had to sneak from house to house, room to room, and they never knew what was hidden behind the next wall. In some rooms, Germans sat waiting with anti-tank guns and fired shells at the Allied soldiers when they appeared in the doorways. When the British made a counterattack, they often walked into an empty room, because the Germans had disappeared through self-made tunnels. Elsewhere, the enemy had made holes in the walls to shoot through.

For Horrocks it was clear that Rees would not be captured quickly and easily. But the corps commander could take solace in the fact that outside the city they had managed to create a completely secure connection over the Rhine, so boats and Buffaloes now sailed freely to and fro across the river.

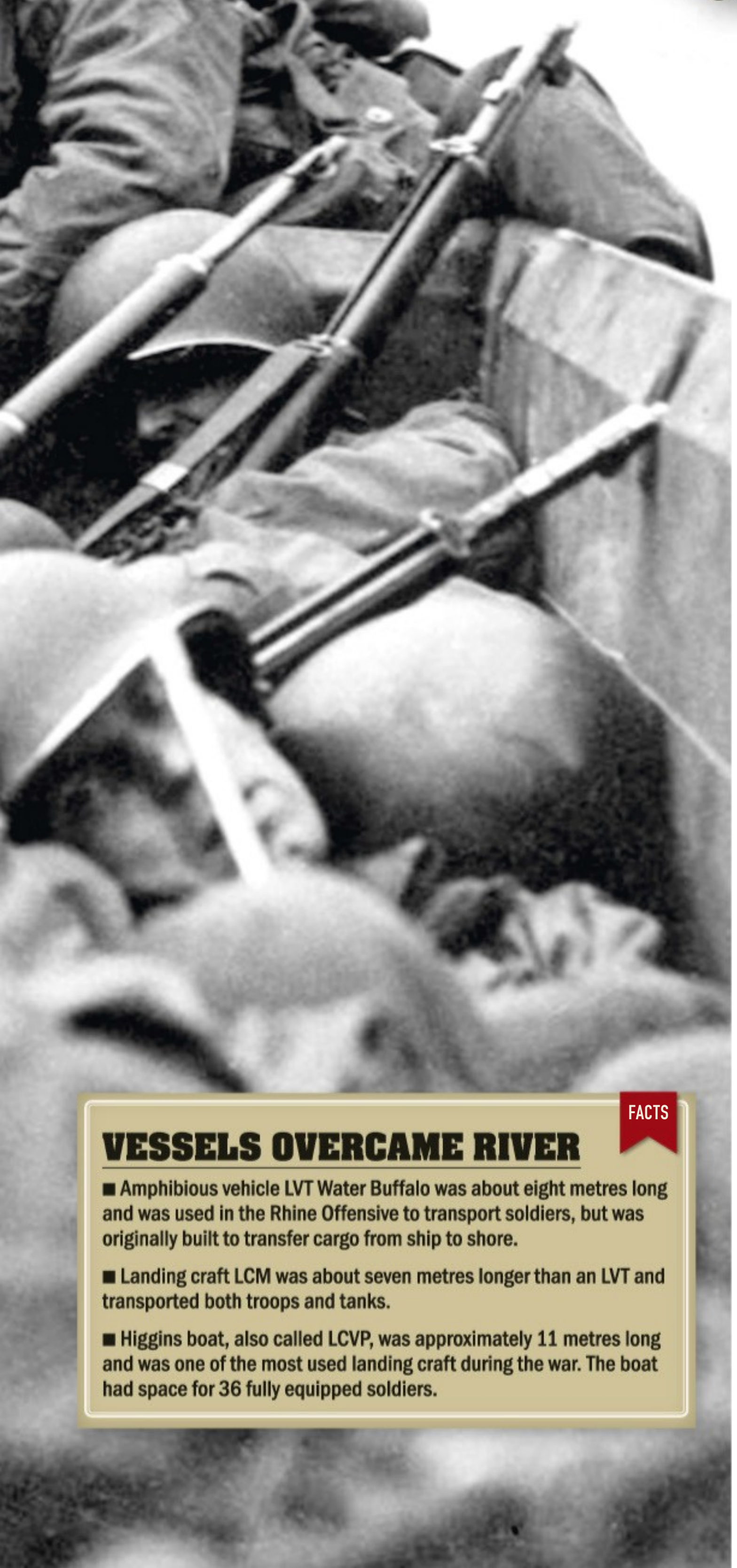
The Allies bombed Wesel

At the same time, Horrocks heard how 77 Lancaster aircraft had bombed an area 25 kilometres further south. The bombing was part of the preparation for the British Rhine crossing at the important German town of Wesel where there was a German communications centre, the main target of Operation Plunder.

The force for this part of the offensive, led by Brigadier Derek Mills-Roberts, had crossed the Rhine at 22.00 with no significant losses. Half an hour later the troops lay a safe distance away, a few kilometres outside of Wesel, while Lancaster bombers dropped their deadly cargo over the city.

“The noise was colossal and the ground shook under us… The whole plain was illuminated by a red, lurid glow”, Mills-Roberts remembered later.

It was not the first time the city’s inhabitants had suffered a bombardment. The Allies had sent bombers against Wesel over the preceding months, and after the Lancasters dropped an additional 1,100 tons of explosives during Operation Plunder, 97 percent of the city was left in ruins: “The



FACTS

VESSELS OVERCAME RIVER

- Amphibious vehicle LVT Water Buffalo was about eight metres long and was used in the Rhine Offensive to transport soldiers, but was originally built to transfer cargo from ship to shore.
- Landing craft LCM was about seven metres longer than an LVT and transported both troops and tanks.
- Higgins boat, also called LCVP, was approximately 11 metres long and was one of the most used landing craft during the war. The boat had space for 36 fully equipped soldiers.

US forces crossed the Rhine at multiple locations without any major losses. But when General George Patton's troops moved into the country east of the river, they encountered surprisingly stiff resistance from German cities.

streets were unrecognisable from our briefing material, and many of the buildings were mere mounds of rubble. Huge craters abounded and into these flowed water mains and sewers, accompanied by escapes of flaming gas… The air was full of smoke and dust, which was like breathing a particularly nauseating fog", recalled a British commando, who was one of the first to enter Wesel. But even with the city in ruins, the enemy refused to give up.

Airborne forces met fierce resistance

Through the flame-lit streets in Wesel, the British commandos clambered over debris and crept forward metre by metre. But the advance through the city, whose population had been estimated at 38,000 three months earlier, was dangerous. "The Germans were alert and came out of the cellars to fight", said one British commando.

In the middle of the night, one unit including Lieutenant Bryan Samain sneaked through Wesel's northern main street, where several dead German soldiers lay on the cracked tarmac. But suddenly one of the "dead" got up and fired his anti-tank Panzerfaust directly at the British from close range. Two soldiers died.

"Feeling very angry, we emptied a magazine of Tommy gun bullets into the German soldier, and into every subsequent 'corpse' we saw lying around", said Samain later.

For four hours

4,000 guns fired at the east bank of the Rhine as a prelude to Operation Plunder. The gun fire would mask the sound of the amphibious vehicles as they crossed.

As daylight broke on 24th March, fighting still raged in Rees and Wesel, but then the Allied soldiers heard a welcome sound from above. The airborne Operation Varsity had been launched, and throughout the morning 1,696 transport aircraft passed over the Rhine to strengthen the hinterland forces. Like snowflakes, 21,680 British, Canadian and American paratroopers dropped from the sky as 1,348 gliders flew silently through the air. During the operation, the airborne forces were greeted by an intense fire from anti-aircraft artillery and ground troops east of Wesel.

"The drop made Arnhem look like a Sunday outing", said a British officer, referring to the Allies' disastrous parachute operation in Holland the previous autumn.

Gliders were particularly vulnerable – as they flew slowly over the Rhine front, they were ripped to pieces by German anti-aircraft fire, falling to the ground like wounded birds. British glider pilot Harry Clark was filled with great sadness as he watched several colleagues crash as they approached the "dense wall of smoke which spread from Wesel to the battlefield" just before the landing area:

"We plunged into the smoke… Our glider hit the ground at approx. 90 mph (140 k/h) losing the wheels on impact. Pieces of wings were torn off as we went through a series of ditches and hedges. We came to a halt and swiftly removed ourselves from the battered wreckage". In total 55 percent of all Allied transport gliders were hit during the approach, but the operation was critical: the remaining gliders brought important supplies into the enemy hinterland in the form of hundreds of jeeps, motorcycles and trailers with large amounts of powerful weapons.

Almost 18,000 soldiers survived the operation. Ground troops established strong positions, so the Germans could not send reinforcements against Rees and Wesel.

At 13.30 on 24th March, British commandos in Wesel linked up with paratroopers north of the city, and at the sight of a much stronger force most Wehrmacht soldiers threw down their guns and surrendered. Two days after crossing the Rhine, exchanges took place in both Rees and Wesel, and on 27th March, Montgomery's 21st Army Group had established a bridgehead; 56 kilometres wide and 32 kilometres deep.

EISENHOWER STOPPED BEFORE BERLIN

To the south, the US 7th Army crossed the Rhine and captured Mannheim, and on 31st March, French units crossed the river at Germersheim. The Rhine's east bank was now a chain of Allied beachheads where Canadians, Britons, Americans and Frenchmen created a 320-kilometre front.

On Eisenhower's order the US 9th Army pulled out of Montgomery's 21st Army Group, and by early April, General William Simpson's forces united with their countrymen from the 1st Army in the town of Lippstadt. The Allies had encircled the Ruhr and trapped Field Marshal Walter Model's Army Group B, which had more than 300,000 soldiers in the area's industrial plants and cities.

The road was opened to fully penetrate into the heart of Germany and it was obvious to Montgomery that the Western Allies could now advance towards Berlin – not least because in mid-April the troops on the Front were located east of the Elbe, just 100 kilometres from the German capital. But Eisenhower, who had command, counselled caution.

Pickaxes helped soldiers remove rubble in the bombed-out cities.

"Making an immediate effort against Berlin would be foolish… While true that we have seized a small bridgehead over the Elbe, it must be remembered that only our spearheads are up that river; our centre of gravity is well back of there", the General argued in a telegram to Washington.

Eisenhower first wanted to secure the flanks of the Baltic Sea and the Danube, so his frontal force on the Elbe of just 50,000 soldiers did not risk being massacred in a daring offensive against Berlin. At the same time, the Red Army was only 70 kilometres east of the German capital. Stalin had gathered more than one million troops ready to attack "the lair of the fascist beast" and Hitler's last stand.

With the Rhine Offensive, the Western Allies had completed their last major offensive. Berlin was left to the Russians.

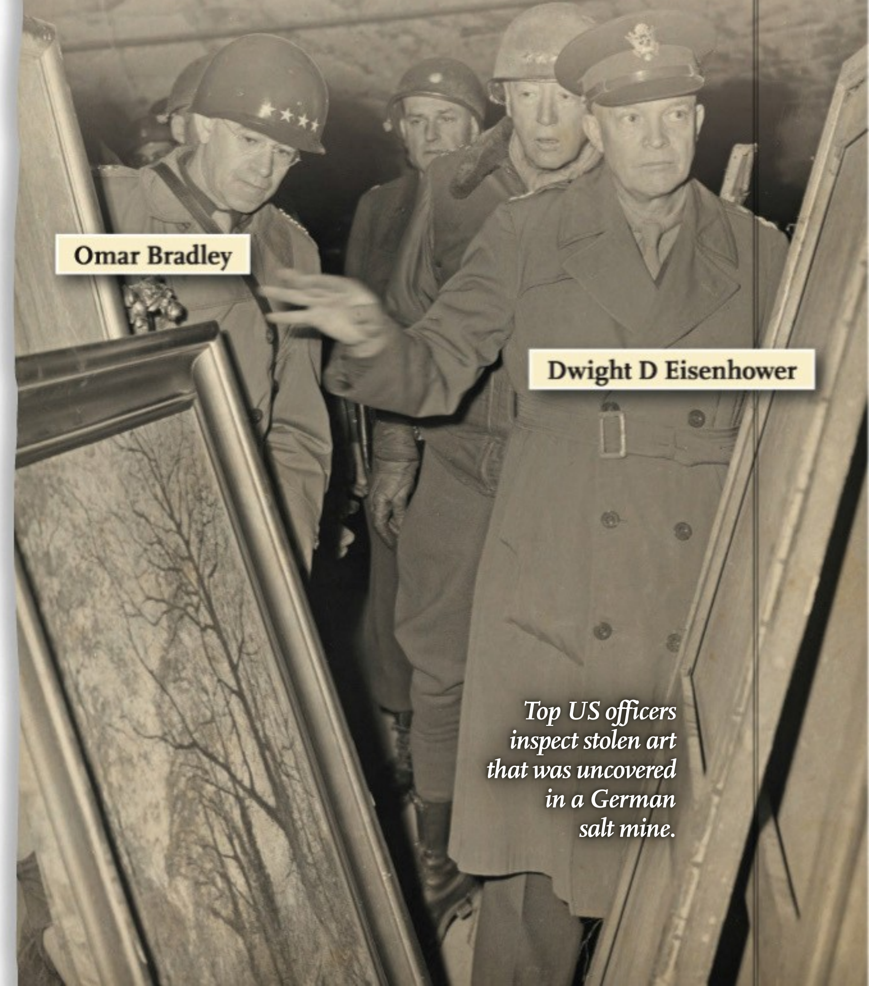
Five million art treasures were recovered

During the offensive in western Germany, the Allies found five million stolen works of art that the Nazis had hidden in basements and tunnels.

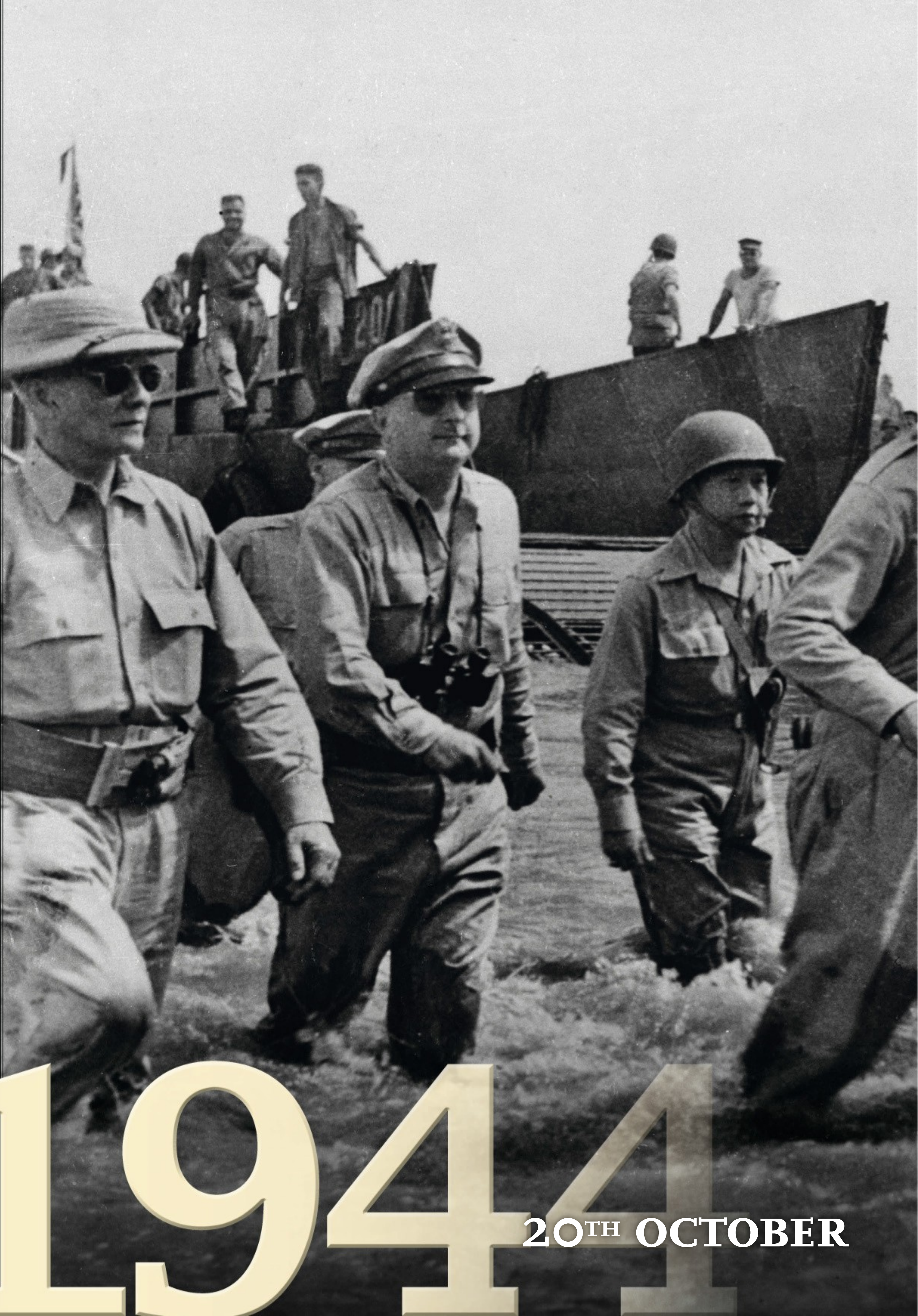
Adolf Hitler had an unquenchable thirst for valuable artefacts, and the Germans plundered art collections across occupied territories. The occupying forces took everything from ancient Egyptian art to paintings by Leonardo da Vinci. As the fortunes of war turned, and the western Allies gradually advanced over German soil, the Nazis' valuable treasures were often either hidden or destroyed.

A group of men on the Allied side were assigned to track down and rescue stolen artworks. The group, called "The Monuments Men", followed on the heels of the Allied armies to root out and recapture the greater part of Hitler's stolen goods.

The art hunters were primarily middle-aged, art-loving family men who voluntarily left their homes to save European heritage. Their efforts, which continued six years after the end of the war, however, were rewarded. A total of 345 men – and women – from 13 countries rediscovered up to five million stolen cultural objects around Germany.



Top US officers inspect stolen art that was uncovered in a German salt mine.



1944

20th OCTOBER

Douglas MacArthur ensured that the photographers were in place before he waded ashore.

Douglas MacArthur

BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF

AMERICANS INVADE THE PHILIPPINES

After more than two years of Japanese occupation, General MacArthur returns to the Philippines. The Japanese are forced to deploy the navy's main strength in an attempt to slow down the flow of soldiers and equipment rolling ashore. But the invasion has catastrophic consequences for the empire.

Philippines, 1944

THE STAGE IS SET

When the Japanese seize the Philippines in 1941, General Douglas MacArthur is forced to flee, but swears to return. In 1944, he's ready to fulfil his vow. MacArthur's invasion force is defended by a strong armada under the command of Admiral William Halsey, but the Japanese are preparing a clever ruse to lure Halsey away.

PHILIPPINES
Leyte Bay

The guns on nearby warships thundered as Douglas MacArthur quietly buttoned his khaki-coloured shirt and tightened the belt firmly around his stomach in his cabin on the *USS Nashville*. The crashes sounded almost like sweet music to the general who'd been looking forward to the day when Americans would begin their liberation expedition to the Philippines. Just over two years previously, MacArthur had been forced to leave the island state when the Japanese landed. Now the 64-year-old would finally get his rematch.

MacArthur placed his gold-plated cap carefully on his head, and then slid an old pistol into one trouser pocket just as his intelligence officer Courtney Whitney entered the cabin.

"That, Court, belonged to my father," MacArthur explained. "I take it merely as a precaution – just to insure that I am never captured alive." The general picked up his beloved corncob pipe before following his countryman out of the door.

Up on the *Nashville's* bridge, the Americans could spy the island of Leyte, where the landing would take place. The sky was shrouded in smoke from the fleet's bombardment, but the white sandy beaches were still visible. Apparently, there was no retaliatory shelling from the coast. A war correspondent with access to the bridge asked the general how he thought it was going. "It's going fine", replied MacArthur, without taking his eyes from the beach. "I believe they'll be a little softer now. But, soft or not, we'll get them."

Around 3,000
Philippine guerrilla soldiers operated on the side of the Allies in Leyte. They went in after the invasion to help US forces with their local knowledge.

After victory in the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944, when the US Navy had crushed the Japanese fleet by sinking three aircraft carriers and shooting down 500 aircraft, the US had become the superior force in the Pacific. During 1944, the Japanese lost ships totalling two million tonnes – the equivalent of over 30 aircraft carriers – and the mother country's shipyards were in no way capable of replacing the losses. In addition, severed supply lines meant the empire lacked oil, minerals and food.

The Japanese were, however, conditioned never to give up and when leading generals gathered in Tokyo in October, they assured Emperor Hirohito that everything had not yet been lost. Virtually all the remaining naval strength would be deployed to face the Americans in a decisive battle in the Philippines. Admiral Soemu Toyoda's plan of redemption – Operation *Sho-Go* (Victory) – would see two major naval forces defeat the American armada in the Philippines.

MacArthur got his way

From the US standpoint, an invasion of the Philippines wasn't strictly necessary, as the main objective of the war was the Japanese mainland. However, the Philippines housed airbases that the US could use to stage sorties against the Japanese mother country. Strategically, the Americans would also be able to cut Japan completely off from oil and other supplies from the Dutch East Indies.

Several generals had reservations about the invasion, but MacArthur forced through his demands. The former defender of the Philippines was obsessed with the idea of liberating the islands as soon as possible, based on his promise to the Philippine people – made shortly before his flight in March 1942 – that he would return.

The plan was to land on Leyte, which was not nearly as well-defended as the Philippines's largest islands. Leyte lay roughly in the middle of the archipelago, and based here, the US had a good base from which to invade the surrounding islands – not least Luzon and the capital, Manila.

MacArthur craved expelling the Japanese from the Philippines, and he had the strength to do it. He revealed in a letter to his wife the evening before the invasion how the fleet

NAME **WILLIAM FREDERICK HALSEY**

TITLE ADMIRAL

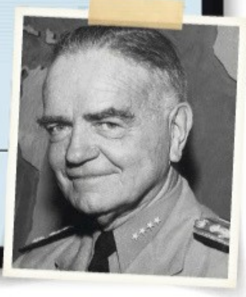
1882-1959

"The Bull" would always attack

William Halsey, nicknamed "Bull", was on assignment with the *USS Enterprise* at the end of 1941, so wasn't in port when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, but his hatred was set. "Before we're through with them, the Japanese language will be spoken only in hell", he raged when he arrived at Pearl Harbor.

Halsey later became commander of the Third Fleet, and gained a reputation as the US's toughest fighting admiral – always ready to attack the enemy.

- **Drank 14 cups of coffee daily.**
- **Took part in Japan's surrender.**



– numbering over 600 – stretched as far as the horizon in whichever direction he looked.

At 09.30 on 20th October, the bay to the east of Leyte was filled – not just with large ships, but dozens of landing craft. As the battleships intensified their bombardment of the beach, the landing forces crawled with weapons down the netting on the sides of each ship before jumping into the rocking Higgins boats.

Boat after boat was filled up. At 09.43 the engines were fired up, and the small vessels shot towards the coast at speeds no less than 20 km/h. At 10.00 the first boats struck land, their ramps dropped and the soldiers poured out. Without stopping to take aim, the men fired in the direction of the palm trees at the beach's edge. But it soon became clear to the Americans that the enemy had abandoned the outer defences after the fleet's heavy bombardment.

THE IRON KNIGHTS
9TH FTR SQDN

The Iron Knights in the 9th Attack Squadron were among the first US troops to land.

That said, as soon as the troops dared to venture into the dense jungle behind the beach, several of the first wave were hit by bullets from Japanese snipers. Most Japanese soldiers, however, were postioned on the rainforest-clad hills, from where they soon started to shell the beach. Moments of nervousness and uncertainty prevailed among the Americans, but gradually the soldiers were able to take out the nearest guns and secure bridgeheads along the landing beaches. Overall, US losses were moderate, and the Japanese were only able to provide sporadic resistance to the 60,000 soldiers who landed.

FREEDOM'S VOICE RESOUNDED

The beaches were still under fire when Douglas MacArthur arrived with the third American wave. The general had – with his usual flair for self-promotion – ensured that photographers had come to shore ahead of him. Wearing his trademark aviator sunglasses, the general waded with decisive steps and swinging arms through the water as the saviour of the Philippines. Without worrying about shells and guns from the hinterland, MacArthur observed the beach and vehicles that were gradually coming ashore, after which he strode towards a table. Here, technicians were preparing a radio transmission that could be heard in Filipino homes. When the last cables were in place, the general took hold of the microphone:

"People of the Philippines: I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God, our forces stand again on Philippine soil."

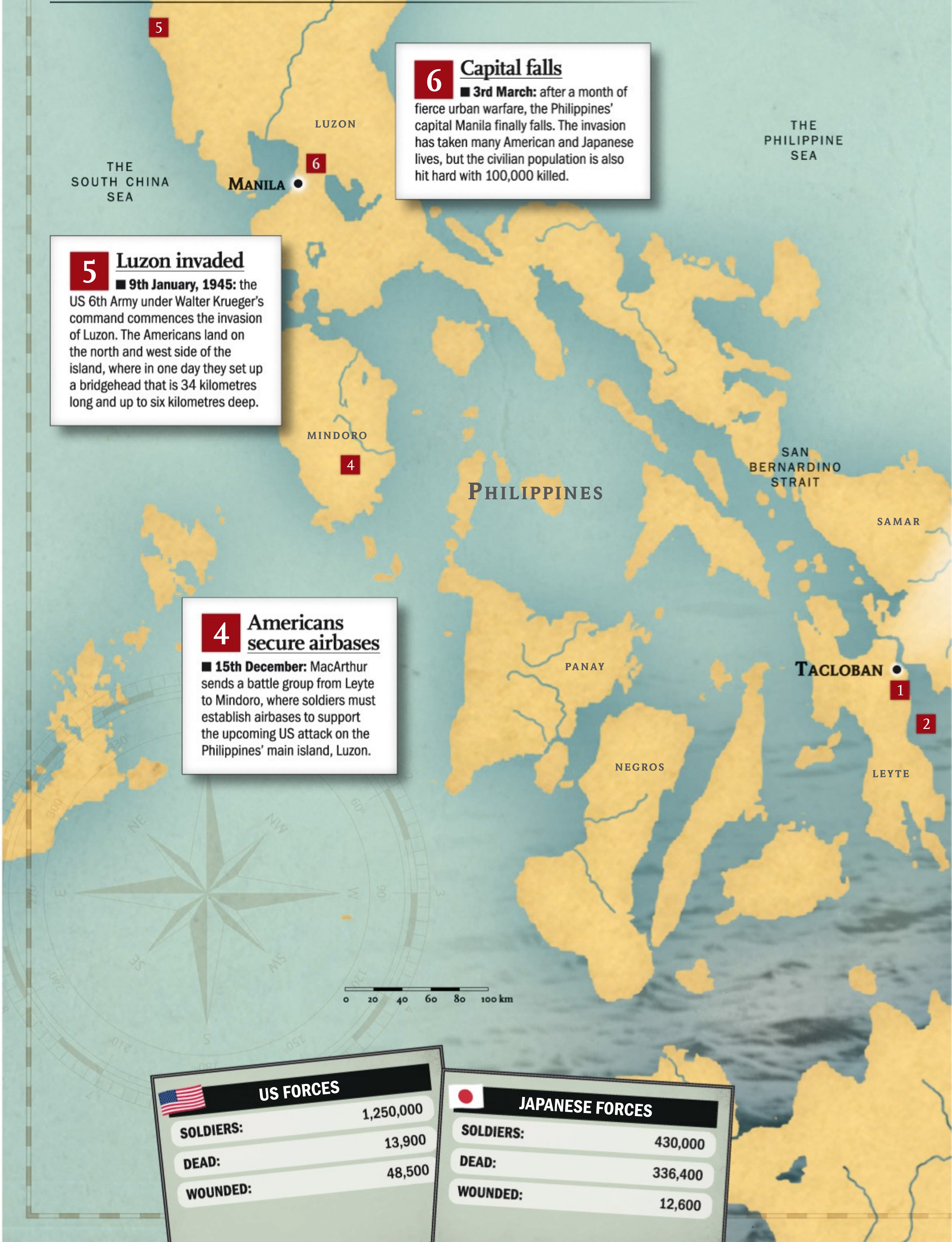
As the general continued his speech, the Japanese Navy made ready for its ambitious attempt to halt the enemy's march in the Pacific. Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's main force had sailed from northern Borneo, and its number included the gargantuan battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi*, which at 70,000 tonnes each were the largest and most heavily armed battleships the world had seen. The metal giants steered towards San Bernardino Strait north of Leyte, where they would attack the Americans in Leyte Bay from the north while a smaller group of ships under Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura would attack from the south. This pincer movement was – the Japanese hoped – the key to defeating the much larger enemy fleet.

Soemu Toyoda, the Japanese commander-in-chief, had one major problem: only a few Japanese aircraft carriers were still available in the Pacific, and they were almost worthless, as the empire did not have enough aircraft or pilots to man them. Therefore, Toyoda opted to use four aircraft

After landing, soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division crossed a water-filled anti-tank barrier left by Japanese troops.

Philippine invasion proved costly

Philippines's many islands were hard to take. From the initial landing on the island of Leyte, Americans had to fight for almost six months before reaching the capital, Manila.


5
LUZON
THE SOUTH CHINA SEA
MANILA
6
THE PHILIPPINE SEA
MINDORO
4
PHILIPPINES
SAN BERNARDINO STRAIT
SAMAR
PANAY
TACLOBAN
1
2
NEGROS
LEYTE
0 20 40 60 80 100 km

6 Capital falls

3rd March: after a month of fierce urban warfare, the Philippines' capital Manila finally falls. The invasion has taken many American and Japanese lives, but the civilian population is also hit hard with 100,000 killed.

5 Luzon invaded

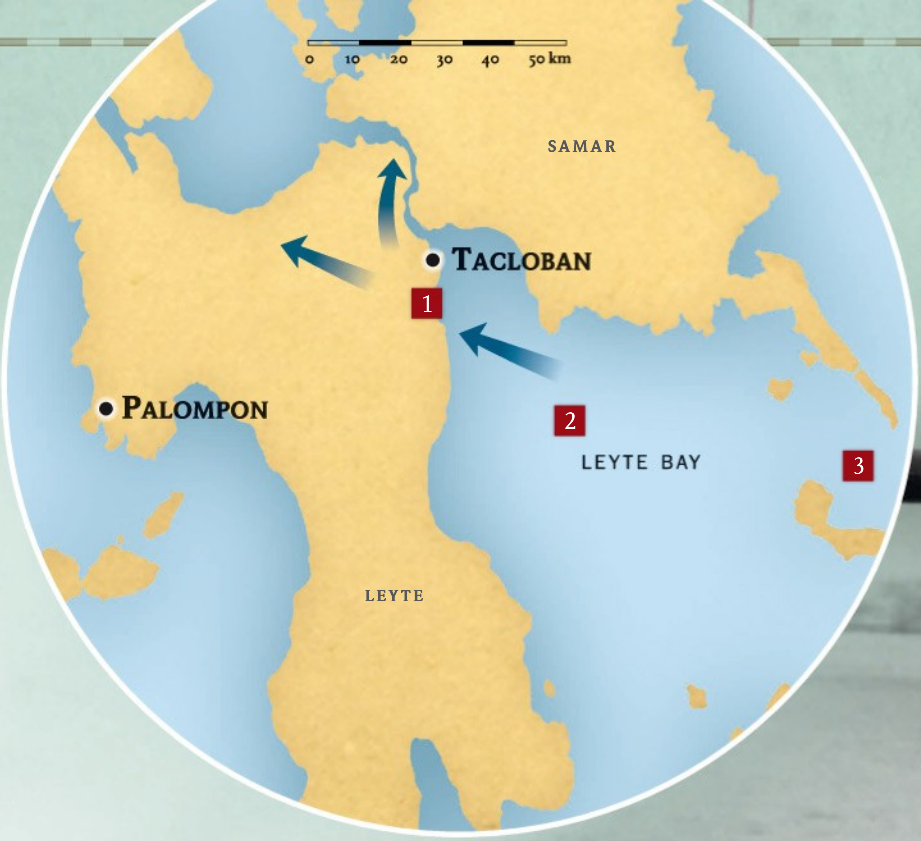
9th January, 1945: the US 6th Army under Walter Krueger's command commences the invasion of Luzon. The Americans land on the north and west side of the island, where in one day they set up a bridgehead that is 34 kilometres long and up to six kilometres deep.

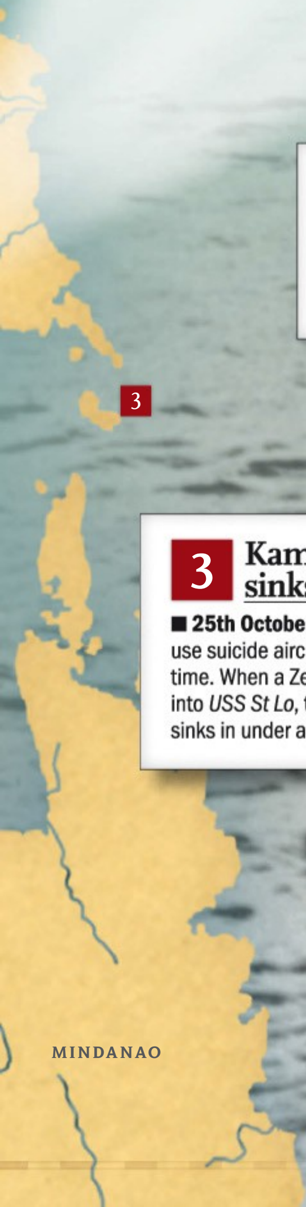
4 Americans secure airbases

15th December: MacArthur sends a battle group from Leyte to Mindoro, where soldiers must establish airbases to support the upcoming US attack on the Philippines' main island, Luzon.

US FORCES	
SOLDIERS:	1,250,000
DEAD:	13,900
WOUNDED:	48,500

JAPANESE FORCES	
SOLDIERS:	430,000
DEAD:	336,400
WOUNDED:	12,600





1 Army lands easily

■ 20th October, 1944: under cover from naval artillery, 60,000 Americans land at Leyte and establish bridgeheads – one near the island's capital Tacloban, and another 18 kilometres to the south. Resistance is weak.

2 Naval attacks are in vain

■ 23rd-26th October: in an attempt to halt the Allied landings, the Japanese begin one of history's largest naval battles in and around Leyte Bay. The imperial fleet suffers huge losses.

3 Kamikaze pilot sinks ship

■ 25th October: the Japanese use suicide aircraft for the first time. When a Zero plane hammers into *USS St Lo*, the escort carrier sinks in under an hour.

Despite kamikaze attacks, the US Navy got off relatively lightly during the naval battle due to Japan's failed strategy.

carriers as bait. The admiral sent the vessels to a position a good distance away from Leyte in the north and prayed the enemy would detect them and send their largest ships away from the Leyte area.

"If the worst should happen, there was a chance that we would lose the entire fleet. But I felt that chance had to be taken... There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the loss of the Philippines", Toyoda wrote later.

For Vice Admiral Kurita, who was to carry out the plans at sea, it was clear that this was going to be a task that would require divine intervention:

"You must remember that there are such things as miracles", he reminded officers in his final pep talk. The first surprise that the Japanese experienced was a negative one, however. The imperial fleet's pride, the super battleship *Musashi*, was considered invincible thanks to her thick armour plating and compartmentalised hull. But on the way to the San Bernardino Strait and Leyte on 23rd October, two US submarines discovered the Japanese. In addition to sinking a few cruisers, crew members alerted fleet commanders, who deployed hundreds of planes with one specific target in mind: *Musashi*.

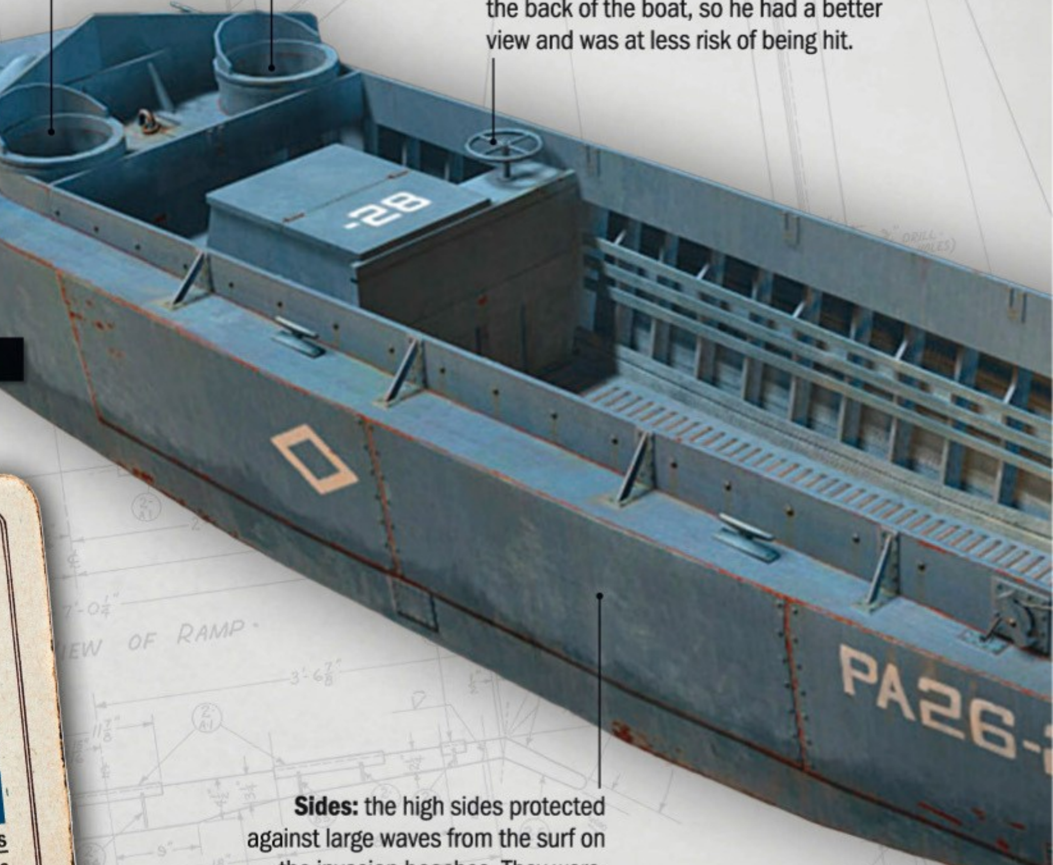
HALSEY CHASED GHOSTS

Next morning, fighter planes, dive bombers and torpedo bombers thundered down between Japan's massive anti-aircraft guns. Although several planes crashed in the sea, *Musashi* was unable to see off the attacks. She was hit by 11 bombs and

LANDING CRAFT

Higgins boats were crucial for the landings

In the Philippines, the Higgins boat proved worth its worth yet again. In the fast and low-bottomed vessel, soldiers were able to come through the surf and land unharmed.



Machine guns: two calibre .30 M1919 machine guns at the back for responding to enemy fire.

Driver's seat: the helmsman was also at the back of the boat, so he had a better view and was at less risk of being hit.

Higgins boat

Sides: the high sides protected against large waves from the surf on the invasion beaches. They were, however, made of plywood, so offered little protection against bullets.

LCVP (Higgins boat)

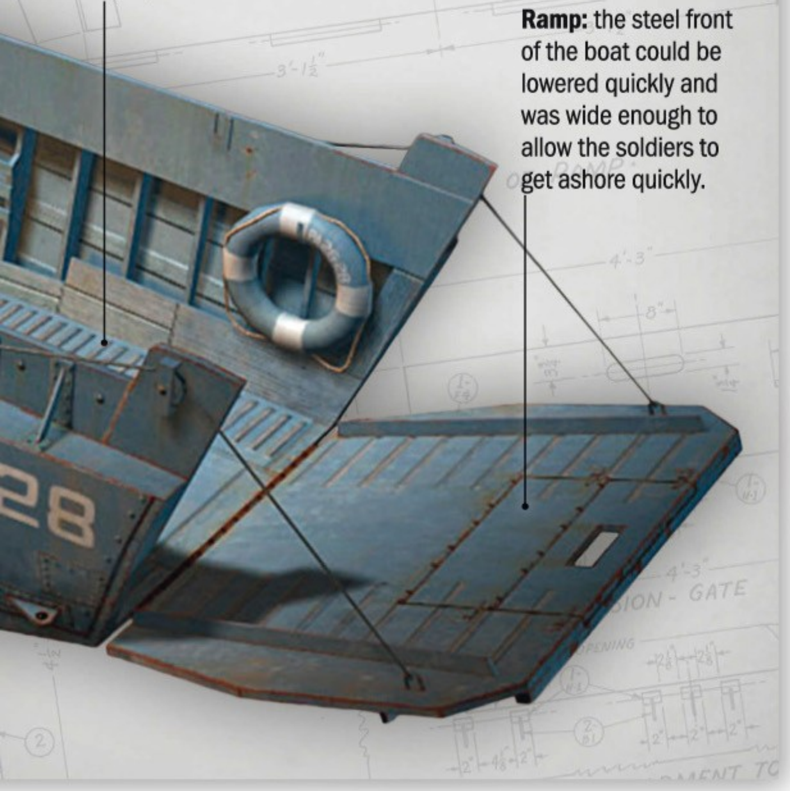
Length	11 metres
Breadth	3.4 metres
Weight	8.2 tonnes
Depth	0.66 metres (forward) and 0.91 metres (aft)
Engine power	225-250 hp
Top speed	22 km/h (17 km/h with full load)

torpedoes, which forced seawater into three of the battleship's four engine rooms. At 19.35, *Musashi* sank and took more than 1,000 men with her into the depths – among them her captain, who stood on the bridge to go down with his ship. Several other ships were also heavily damaged. The only remaining hope now was that the enemy took the bait.

Australia participated in the liberation of the Philippines, primarily with naval units. Mexico contributed a fighter squadron called the Aztec Eagles.

On the American battleship *USS New Jersey*, Admiral William Halsey was annoyed even though his aircraft had just sunk the enemy's flagship. Ideally, the admiral would like to hit the enemy's aircraft carriers. Halsey had no idea that the Japanese had so few aircraft left that the carriers posed no serious threat. Ever since he'd landed on Leyte, Halsey had sent patrols into the air daily, but with no results. At 05.00 on 25th October, the admiral was finally informed that several enemy ships had been located north of the Philippines.

When soldiers in Higgins boats had created a bridgehead, larger ships could bring supplies ashore.


Cargo: each boat could accommodate 36 soldiers or a jeep and 12 soldiers.

Ramp: the steel front of the boat could be lowered quickly and was wide enough to allow the soldiers to get ashore quickly.

In his eagerness to strike a death blow, Halsey immediately sailed north with 35 ships. The defence of the San Bernardino Strait was left to six small escort carrier ships and six destroyers. Halsey knew that Kurita had sailed away from the Philippines the previous day and so did not attach any strategic importance to the Strait.

But Kurita had reversed course under cover of darkness. At 07.30, the Japanese suddenly appeared in the San Bernardino Strait with four battleships, eight heavy cruisers and at least 10 destroyers. Admiral Halsey's big ships were far away.

"By heaven-sent opportunity, we are dashing to attack enemy carriers", Kurita announced on the radio to Toyoda.

ADMIRAL WAS CAUGHT BY SURPRISE

For Rear Admiral Clifton Sprague, who'd been left in command of the remaining US ships, the sight of the enemy's much larger fleet was a grim one.

"I didn't think we'd last 15 minutes", he later recalled. "But I thought we might as well give them all we've got before we go down."

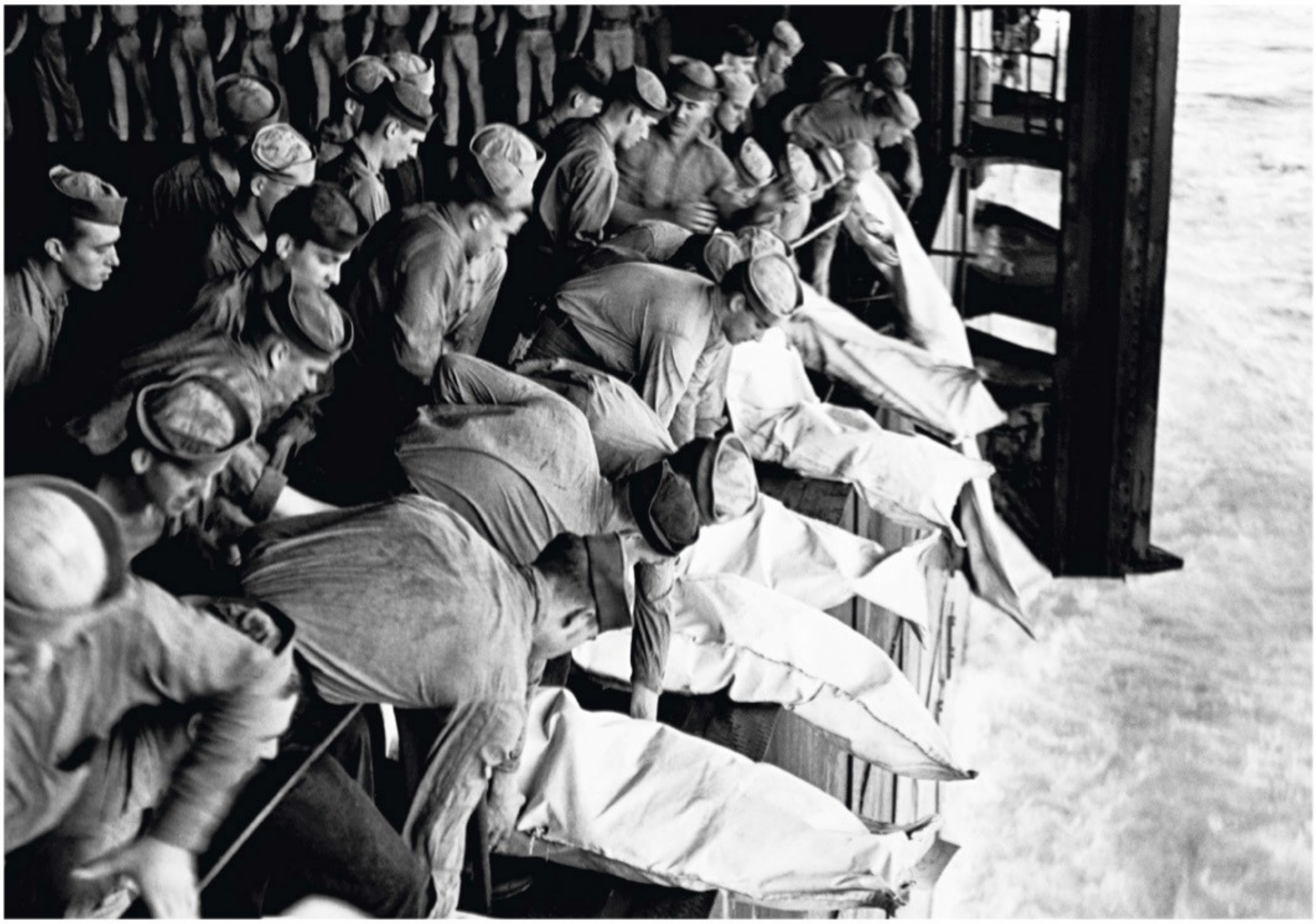
Despite scepticism, the sailors rallied to his call. Gunners manned the ships' guns as light from the shells the Japanese had sent up to mock the Americans through the cloud coloured the morning sky. Soon guns rumbled from both sides, but the Japanese's proved stronger. Artillery from their powerful battleships and heavy cruisers tore US vessels to pieces, and soon most of Sprague's warships lay shattered on the water, bobbing about like crushed tin cans.

The rear admiral did, however, have some planes at his disposal. The aircraft attracted Japanese fire and created confusion, so Kurita was not able to take advantage of his numerical superiority. After two hours of struggle, Kurita suddenly withdrew his fleet from the San Bernardino Strait. Sprague was surprised to say the least. The Japanese commander could have sailed past Sprague's beaten fleet and headed for the landing beaches, but the Japanese mistakenly believed that more American ships were hiding in the waters, fearing that Halsey's fleet would block the Strait to the north and trap Kurita inside. Instead of a major Japanese victory, Sprague and his men returned as heroes.

"The history of the United States Navy records no more glorious two hours of resolution, sacrifice, and success", was the assessment of Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the US Pacific fleet.

In the meantime, Halsey succeeded in sinking the four aircraft carriers that had been used as bait, while »

MacArthur added even more decorations to his cap as Field Marshal of the Filipino army.



Although the Japanese suffered the largest casualties, the US also lost many soldiers and seamen. Here the fallen from the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid, known as The Fighting "I", are buried at sea on 26th November, 1944 after history's largest naval battle.

Shoji Nishimura's fleet that was to attack Leyte Bay from the south, was completely destroyed.

In the space of four days, the US had taken complete control of the waters around the Philippines and thus the Pacific as a whole. However, "Bull" Halsey was heavily criticised for leaving Leyte's bridgehead to sail north. Several officers attacked the admiral at a staff dinner with MacArthur on 26th October.

"That's enough!" roared MacArthur and hammered his fist on the table, so plates and cutlery rattled. "Leave the Bull alone! He's still a fighting admiral in my book."

MacArthur held the rank of Field Marshal of the Philippine Army in addition to his US rank. After 1946, the rank disappeared from the Philippine military and is not in use today.

MacArthur targeted by planes

The victory in Leyte Bay meant that the US could continue its campaign to expel the Japanese from the Philippines. But even though the landing had been easy, the conquest of Leyte proved anything but. The infantry struggled through the muddy jungle as the heavy October monsoons soaked soldiers' uniforms so they stuck to the skin. The unforgiving landscape meant there was no real front line, and the US had to fight down narrow paths where tanks couldn't go. Often bullets suddenly rained from hidden trenches, or the soldiers were ambushed from behind by enemy forces concealed in the dense vegetation.

Even MacArthur couldn't feel safe on Leyte. The general had proclaimed himself the liberator of the Philippines and Japanese high command in Tokyo had a burning desire to see him dead. Thanks to intercepted radio communications, Japanese army chiefs knew that MacArthur had established his headquarters in Tacloban after the city had been liberated. One November, two Zero fighters swooped down on the so-called Price House, where MacArthur happened to be sitting alone and working at his desk. In the space of a few seconds their bullets smashed through the windows and ripped up the furniture. When the Zero fighters had gone, staff officer Larry Lehrbas rushed into the office.

"Larry", MacArthur said, taking his pipe out to point to the bullet holes 30 centimetres above his head. "Dig those out."

Nevertheless, on Christmas Day 1944 the general was able to finally announce from the same office that "The Leyte-Samar campaign can now be regarded as closed except for minor mopping-up". At the same time, the islands of Samar and Mindoro with their strategic airbases were also under US control.

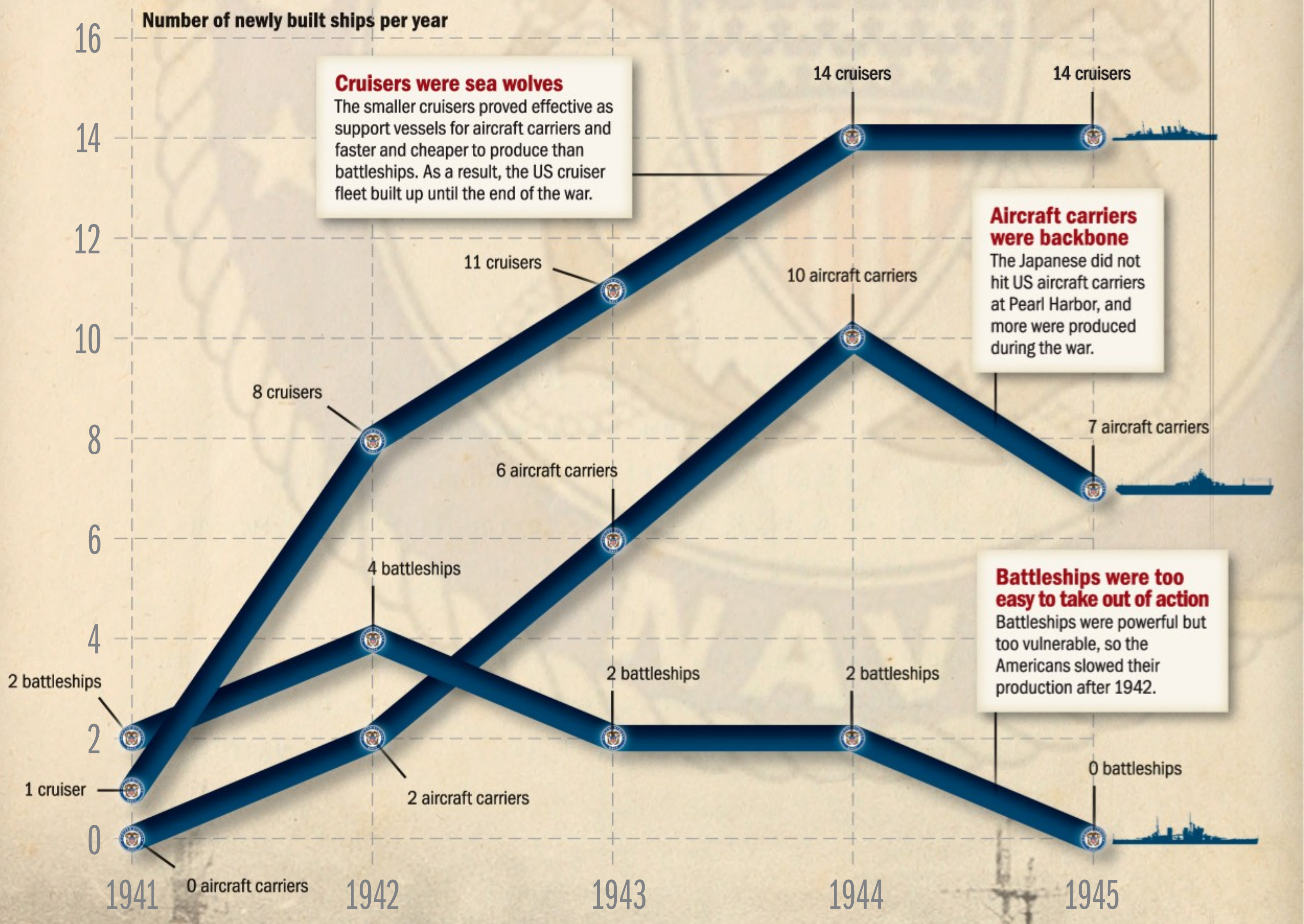
Douglas MacArthur rubbed his hands – after three years of waiting, it was finally time to invade the main island of Luzon and liberate his beloved Manila.

Get the CARRIERS
G.Q.

Pilots unwind after a mission. Note the message on the board to target aircraft carriers.

US Navy was giant of the sea

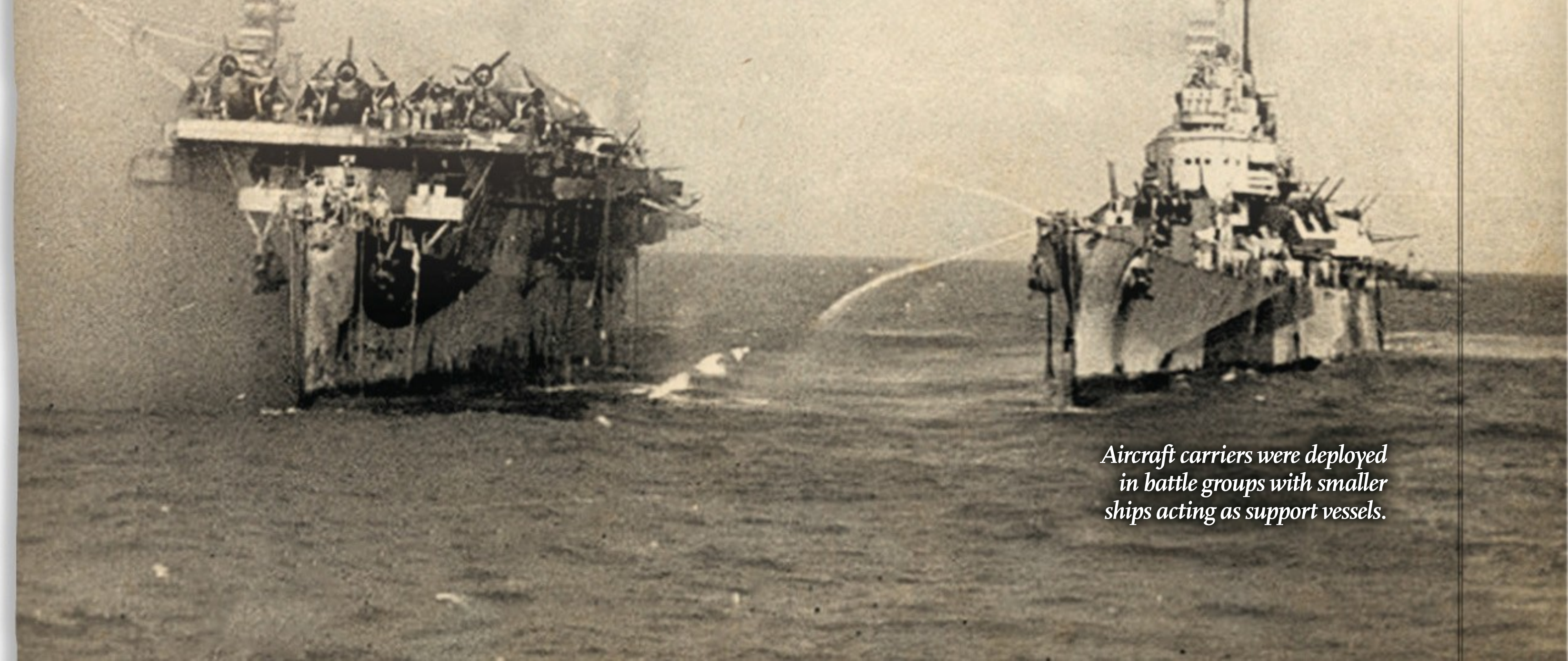
A well-oiled war production machine meant the US Navy grew to gigantic proportions. Once the industry came up to speed, the Japanese had no chance of keeping up.



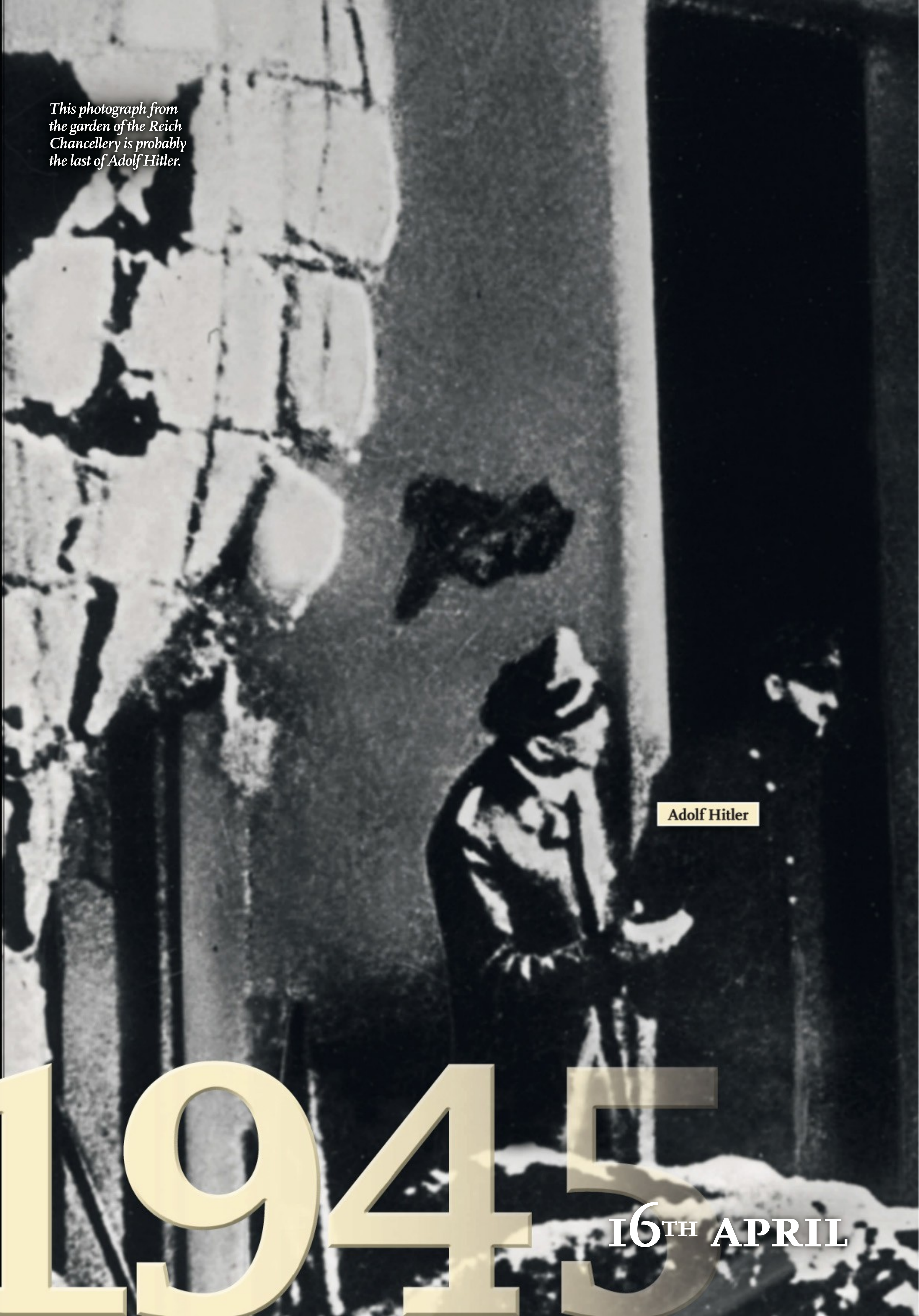
Cruisers were sea wolves
The smaller cruisers proved effective as support vessels for aircraft carriers and faster and cheaper to produce than battleships. As a result, the US cruiser fleet built up until the end of the war.

Aircraft carriers were backbone
The Japanese did not hit US aircraft carriers at Pearl Harbor, and more were produced during the war.

Battleships were too easy to take out of action
Battleships were powerful but too vulnerable, so the Americans slowed their production after 1942.



Aircraft carriers were deployed in battle groups with smaller ships acting as support vessels.


Adolf Hitler

This photograph from the garden of the Reich Chancellery is probably the last of Adolf Hitler.

1945

16TH APRIL

HITLER'S FINAL DAYS

While the Allies rumble through Germany, Adolf Hitler is holed up in a bunker deep under Berlin. In the last days, the Führer's aides witness his birthday, wedding and suicide.

Berlin, 1945

THE STAGE IS SET

Berlin
GERMANY

The Second World War is nearing its end. Berlin is under constant bombardment from advancing Russian forces and Allied aircraft. Hitler decides to move permanently into the Führerbunker. With him, he takes a staff of long-serving loyal supporters. Eyewitnesses have their own experiences of the last days.

HITLER SPENT MOST OF THE WAR at his residence in Bavaria or in the Wolf's Lair in East Prussia, but as the enemy approached from all sides, the Führer chose to move to Berlin, where he took up lodging in the Reich Chancellery and later in the bunker beneath it.

MONDAY, 16TH APRIL, 1945

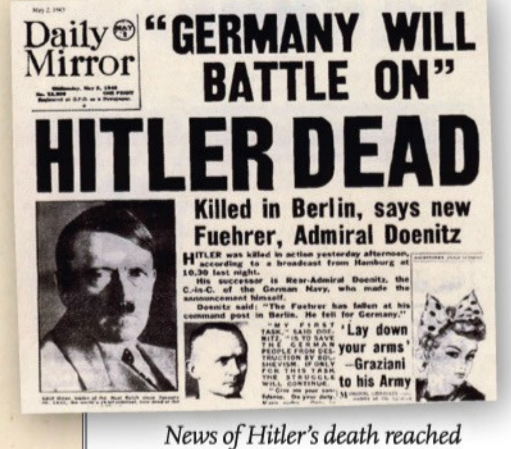
For several months, the Red Army prepared for the storming of Berlin. Now the 2.5 million Soviet soldiers began their final offensive from the River Oder's East Bank.

Bodyguard Rochus Misch: Sometime in mid-April, bunker life began. Hitler descended into the place where he would die. Eva never left his side, and lived from then on in his dressing room. All situation conferences were now held in the Führerbunker map room, and the bunker telephone switchboard had to be manned around the clock. Our SS Bodyguard commander Franz Schädle came up to me: “Misch, you are going down there with them”.

> “The only chance of saving our own skins would come after Hitler's death”
>
> Rochus Misch, Hitler's bodyguard

I was surrounded by cold, damp, glaring white artificial light. To know that Hitler had to live and suffer under the same conditions was of little comfort. Or should I say, it gave me no comfort? Now it was no longer time to think of others, not even the Führer.

Armaments Minister Albert Speer: Even during this last period of his life, in April 1945, I still occasionally sat with Hitler in the bunker bent over the building plans for Linz, mutely contemplating the dreams of yesteryear. His study, roofed with more than five metres of concrete and topped with two metres of earth, was undoubtedly the safest place in Berlin. When heavy bombs exploded in the vicinity this massive bunker shook. Hitler would give a start. What had become of the formerly fearless corporal of the First World War?



Daily Mirror

“GERMANY WILL BATTLE ON”

HITLER DEAD

Killed in Berlin, says new Fuehrer, Admiral Doenitz

HITLER was killed in action yesterday afternoon, according to a broadcast from Hamburg at 10.30 last night.

His successor is Rear-Admiral Doenitz, the C.-in-C. of the German Navy, who made the announcement himself.

Doenitz said: “The Fuehrer has fallen at his command post in Berlin. He fell for Germany.”

“MY FIRST TASK,” SAID DOENITZ, “IS TO SAVE THE GERMAN PEOPLE FROM DESTRUCTION BY BOLSHEVISM. IF ONLY FOR THIS TASK THE STRUGGLE WILL CONTINUE.”

‘Lay down your arms’ —Graziani to his Army

News of Hitler's death reached the front pages of Western newspapers on 2nd May.

FRIDAY, 20TH APRIL, 1945

On the Western Front US troops occupied Nuremberg. Berlin was under intense fire from the Russians.

Chauffeur Erich Kempka: The Führer's 56th birthday. I reflected on the past years when the German people celebrated this day, and held great receptions.

When first employed in 1932, I dreamed of being his chauffeur and constant companion on the road, to have a modest place in his attempts for peaceful solutions to the problems we faced. Within limits, life fulfilled my wish.

Albert Speer: A delegation of Hitler Youth who had fought well was presented to him in the garden. Hitler spoke a few words, patted one or another of the boys. His voice was low. He broke off rather abruptly. Probably he sensed that his only convincing role now was as an object of pity. Most of his entourage avoided the embarrassment of a celebration by coming to the military situation conference as usual.

Secretary Traudl Junge: In the evening we sat crammed together in the little study. Hitler was silent, staring into space. We too asked him if he wouldn't leave Berlin. “No, I can't”, he replied. “I must bring things to a head here in Berlin – or go under!” We said nothing, and the champagne, we were drinking to Hitler's health, tasted insipid.

For Hitler had now said out loud what we had all seen: he himself no longer believed in victory. He retired early, and the birthday party broke up. But Eva Braun came back once she had led Hitler to his room. A restless fire burned in her eyes. She had on a new dress made of silvery blue brocade. Eva Braun wanted to numb the fear that had awoken in her heart. She wanted to celebrate again; she wanted to dance, to drink, to forget… I was only too willing to be infected by the last stirrings of lust for life.

Eva Braun carried off everyone she met on her way through the bunker up to her old living room on the first floor which was still intact, although the good furniture was down in the bunker now. The large, round table was laid festively once again for any of Hitler's entourage who were still in Berlin. Someone produced an old gramophone from somewhere with a single record. "Blood-red roses speak of happiness to you..." Eva Braun whirled everyone away in a desperate frenzy, like a woman who has already felt the faint breath of death. We drank champagne, there was shrill laughter, and I laughed too because I didn't want to cry. In the midst of this an explosion silenced the party for a moment, someone hurried to the phone. But no one said anything about war, victory or death. This was a party given by ghosts. And they kept speaking of happiness... I suddenly thought I might throw up any minute.

SATURDAY, 21ST APRIL, 1945

Soviet grenades rained down on the Reich Chancellery garden with the Führerbunker below.

Rochus Misch: The last months had not passed Hitler by without leaving their mark. Every defeat, every setback, every act of treason – real or imagined – from within his closest circle contributed to his clearly recognisable physical decay. Now his gait was sluggish and he dragged a leg. The eyes often seemed to have no fixed point, while his sense of balance seemed disturbed. Above all, in his every movement he had slowed, and all in all he looked to me like an old man.

SUNDAY, 22ND APRIL, 1945

Soviet soldiers penetrated into the districts of Pankow and Karl Horst. The inner defence ring was broken and Hitler allowed some of his staff to leave. A plane was ready to evacuate them.

Rochus Misch: Like all days since we began our bunker existence 22nd April, 1945 had no beginning. At some point or other the long sleepless night ended in morning. I nodded off again and was trying to keep myself awake with cognac and chocolate. The situation was more futile with every passing minute.

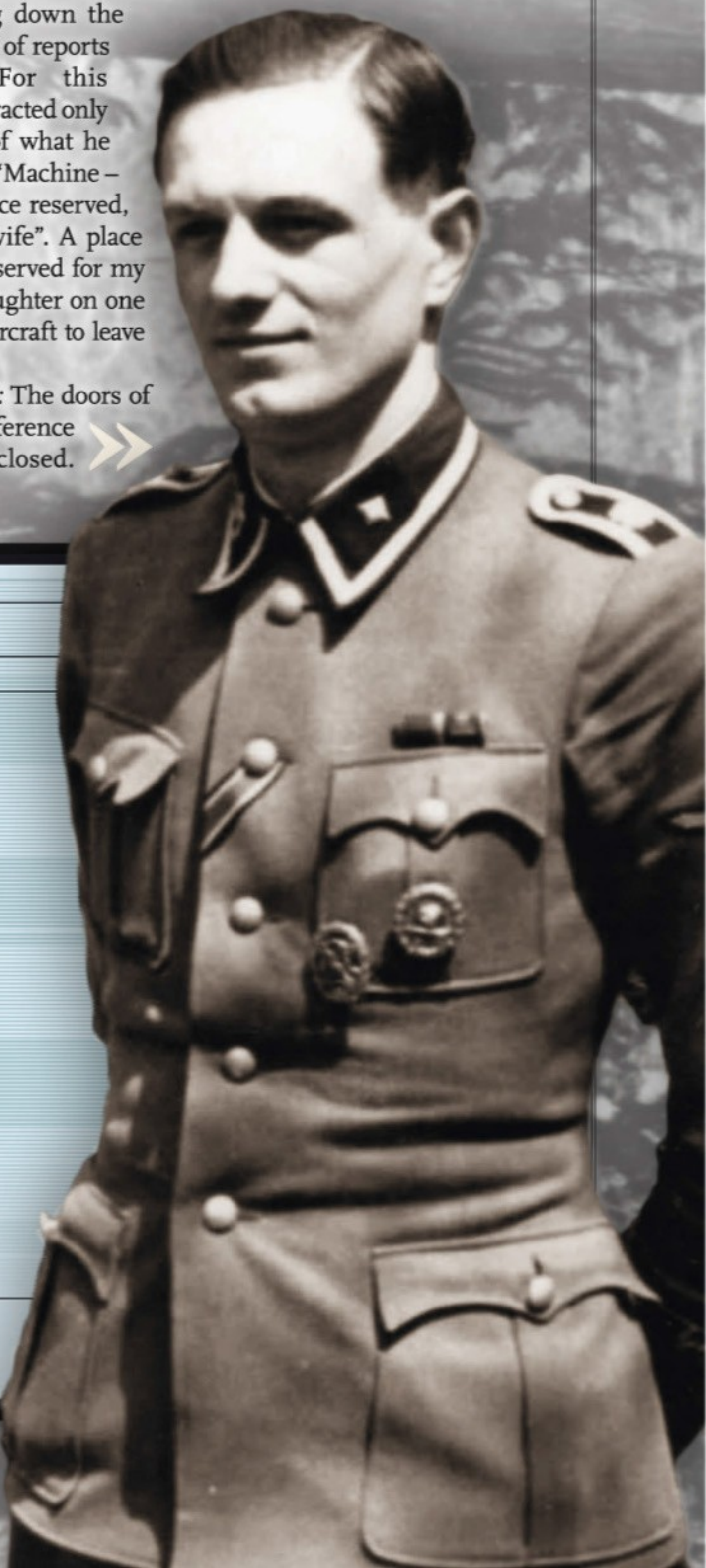
Hitler's hoped-for breach between the Western Powers and the Russians had not come about... I had the commander of the 9th Army, General Busse on the line. I connected him to General Burgdorf. Busse reported:

"The bitter fighting has as its hallmark the increasing excessive demands made of the troops and the irreplaceable losses in men and materials". I listened in to the whole conversation – contrary to regulations. I was hoping to find sparks of hope, but found none.

The phone rang again. Our chief Franz Schädle, was on the other end of the line. I had been noting down the main points of reports mentally. For this reason, I extracted only fragments of what he was saying: "Machine – fly out – place reserved, fetch your wife". A place had been reserved for my wife and daughter on one of the last aircraft to leave Berlin.

Traudl Junge: The doors of Hitler's conference room are closed.

»



1917-2013

NAME **ROCHUS MISCH**

TITLE HITLER'S BODYGUARD

Loyal soldier was taken prisoner in Russia

During the attack on Poland in 1939, Sergeant Rochus Misch was shot and seriously wounded in the stomach. After staying in a number of hospitals, he spent six weeks at a convalescent home. Here he was invited to apply for a position in the SS bodyguard corps who surrounded Hitler – the so-called Führerbegleitkommando. For the rest of the war Misch was close to Hitler and became his most trusted bodyguard. Members of the SS bodyguard were usually the only ones with the right to bear arms in Hitler's presence.

Misch was brutally interrogated by the Russians after he had been captured. After his return to Berlin in 1953, he bought a small business, which he ran successfully for many years.

He gave many interviews to media and claimed to know nothing about the extermination of Jews, but remained loyal to the last: "I had seen neither a monster nor a superman [but] a normal, simple man", he said.

- **Was orphaned at two years old and grew up with his grandparents.**
- **Was living in Berlin after the war because his wife would not move.**

Hitler gave a gun to Eva Braun, and as far as we know, she used it.

There's an agitated discussion in progress behind them. My colleague Frau Christian, Martin Bormann's secretary Fraülein Krüger and I are sitting in the dietician's kitchen drinking strong coffee. At last, the heavy iron door opens… His [Hitler's] eyes are blank.

"Get changed at once. A plane is leaving in an hour and will take you south. All is lost, hopelessly lost".

I am frozen rigid. Eva Braun is the first to rouse herself. She goes towards Hitler, takes both hands and says, smiling and comforting, in tones you might use to a small child: "But you know I'll stay with you. I'm not letting you send me away". Hitler's eyes began to shine, and he did something no one had seen before: He kissed Eva Braun on the mouth. I don't want to say it, but it came out by its own accord:

"I'm staying too", I said.

Rochus Misch: I was released from duty and a colleague from the motor pool drove me to Rudow. Berlin was deserted: nobody was about. The man drove as fast as the ruined streets would allow. I suspected that Gerda and our one-year daughter, Brigitta, would be in the air raid shelter. I had myself driven there and found them quickly.

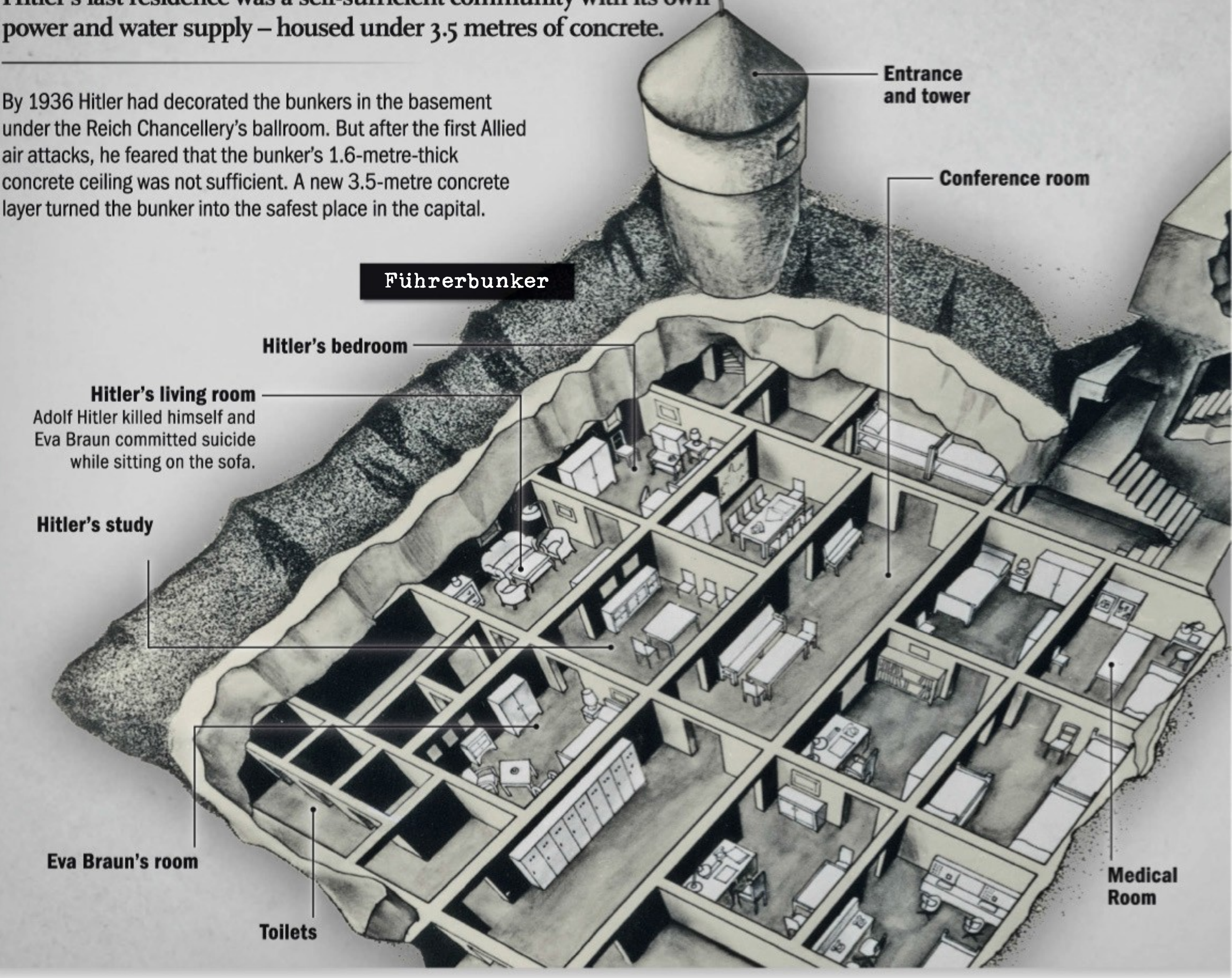
Gerda fell into my arms straight away. Her reaction to my life-saving message came as a terrible blow to me: she shook her head. No, she could not fly out, she said. Brigitta had a high fever. Furthermore, she did not want to leave her parents

HEADQUARTERS

Bunker was safest place in Berlin

Hitler's last residence was a self-sufficient community with its own power and water supply – housed under 3.5 metres of concrete.

By 1936 Hitler had decorated the bunkers in the basement under the Reich Chancellery's ballroom. But after the first Allied air attacks, he feared that the bunker's 1.6-metre-thick concrete ceiling was not sufficient. A new 3.5-metre concrete layer turned the bunker into the safest place in the capital.


Führerbunker
Entrance and tower
Conference room
Hitler's bedroom
Hitler's living room
Adolf Hitler killed himself and Eva Braun committed suicide while sitting on the sofa.
Hitler's study
Eva Braun's room
Toilets
Medical Room

alone in Berlin. I tried to persuade her, mentioned the atrocities committed by the Russians against civilians in East Prussia. But I failed to convince her. “It is the last chance, Gerda,” I implored. My wife shook her head sadly.

MONDAY, 23RD APRIL, 1945

Reichsmarschall (Marshal of the Reich) Göring sent a telex wanting to know if Hitler could still lead the country’s defence. If not, Göring as Hitler’s successor would take over. Hitler smelt betrayal and ordered the Reichsmarschall be arrested.

Erich Kempka: This telegram... came as a bombshell. Since the failure of the Luftwaffe leadership, there had been a poor relationship between Hitler and the Reichsmarschall... None of us dreamed that Göring would send such a message, however, for he was almost dictating to Hitler.

Traudl Junge: None of us could sleep. As shadows roamed around the bunker and we waited. Sometimes we sneaked up the stairs, waiting for a lull in artillery fire and saw with dismay how the devastation spread. We are surrounded by ruins. A dead horse lies in the middle of Wilhelmplatz. But my feelings are deadened. I feel quite hollow.

TUESDAY, 24TH APRIL, 1945

Hitler gave orders to transform the Nazi parade ground’s East-West axis to a makeshift runway.

Rochus Misch: Those among us, who were here by virtue of their services being indispensable, knew only too well that the only chance of saving our own skins would come after Hitler’s death. Therefore we waited for it.

THURSDAY, 26TH APRIL, 1945

Goering’s successor as Reichsmarschall was found in the form of Field Marshal Ritter von Greim, who flew from Munich to Berlin to take up his appointment. With him he brought test pilot Hanna Reitsch.

Pilot Hanna Reitsch: All hell broke loose: bullets and shells flew everywhere. It seemed for an instant as though the whole might of the Russian army was focused on this one tiny plane. I could see their faces as they fired everything they had – rifles, machine guns and antitank grenades. Gun muzzles flared, tanks thundered, fighters zipped overhead.

A yellow explosion flashed over the engine and I heard von Greim shouting that he was hit. Almost mechanically von Greim slumped backwards and I reached around him and grabbed the control stick. The Storch was hit. With horror I noticed that both wing engines were leaking petrol. The plane should have been doomed but somehow it struggled on.

We approached the radio tower in Berlin just visible through thick swirls of acrid smoke. The ground fire dwindled as we came back into German-held territory. Those weeks of running routes through Berlin now served a purpose. I knew exactly how to reach the Brandenburg Gate and land the plane. The area was almost deserted.

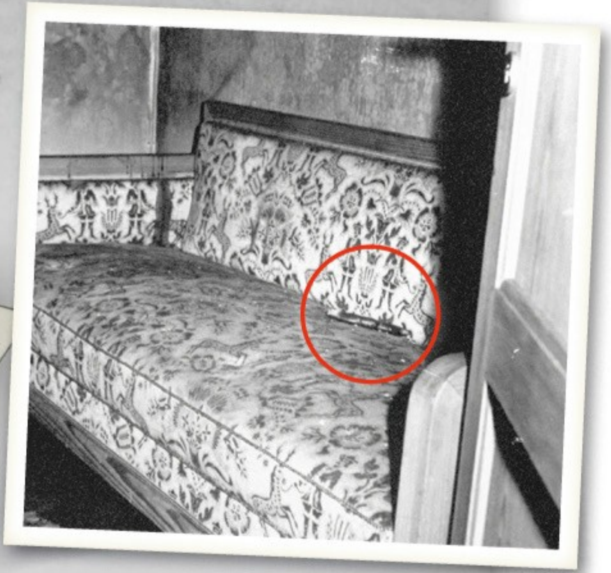
Von Greim had regained consciousness with the greatest difficulty and I helped him out of the machine. He sat on the side of the road. Now we just waited – on the off-chance that a vehicle may come our way – we could only hope it would not be a Russian one.

Traudl Junge: Hanna Reitsch is a small, delicate, very feminine person, you’d never have thought she had such masculine courage. She wears the Iron Cross on her smooth black rollneck sweater. Von Greim limps into the bunker on one leg, leaning on her shoulder... Hanna Reitsch hurries to see the Führer. She must have been one of those women who adored Hitler unconditionally, without reservations.

FRIDAY, 27TH APRIL, 1945

The Red Army was in Alexanderplatz, a few kilometres from the Führerbunker. Speer was asked to explain why he'd failed to fulfil Hitler’s command to destroy the German factories.

Albert Speer: I felt considerable apprehension when I was led into Hitler's office deep underground. He was alone, received me frostily... “Bormann has given me a report on your conference with the Ruhr Gauleiters. You pressed



A gun was found on the couch where Eva Braun took poison, and Adolf Hitler shot himself.

FACTS

BUNKER WAS DAMP

- The Führerbunker was part of the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. Several German leaders had lived in the area since the 1800s.
- The bunker lay below ground water level making it damp and clammy. A system of pumps kept the water out, while a diesel generator supplied electricity for the entire facility.
- Hitler moved into the Führerbunker full-time from January 1945.
- After the war, the Russians destroyed most of the bunker.

them not to carry out my orders... Are you aware of what must follow from that?"

As if he were reminded of something remote, his voice softened... and almost in a normal tone he added: "If you were not my architect, I would take the measures that are called for in such a case."

"Suddenly I feel something like hatred and helpless anger rise in me"

Traudl Junge, Hitler's secretary

Saturday, 28th April, 1945

While Hitler's staff listened to the BBC, the British radio station announced that SS leader Heinrich Himmler led secret peace talks with the Swedish diplomat Folke Bernadotte.

Rochus Misch: For a moment Hitler lost his self-control... "Himmler of all people, Himmler of all people!" The whole thing reminded me of his reaction to Hess's defection to Britain in 1941. Hitler called Hanna Reitsch and Ritter von Greim to him. They were to arrest Himmler.

Hanna Reitsch: Dispatch riders reported that the Axis was clear of shell craters for 400 yards, but that the situation might alter at any moment. Though enemy searchlights were groping up and down the Axis we managed to take-off without being spotted and headed towards the Brandenburg Gate.

Sunday, 29th April, 1945

In Italy, partisans killed Mussolini and his mistress. The news filled Hitler with terror.

Rochus Misch: Shortly after midnight I saw a man in the bunker whom I had never seen before. "That is the registrar," said Hannes Hentschel, who was responsible for the technical installations in the machinery room.

In this manner I heard of the planned marriage of Hitler to Eva Braun. There were a few well-wishers present. I remained at my workplace and wondered how I would address Eva Braun when I met her. "Frau Hitler" – that did not seem possible.

Traudl Junge: The Führer comes towards me. "There's something I'd like you to take down from dictation later", he says. I sit down alone at the big table and wait. Then, suddenly, the Führer utters the first words. "My political testament".

Now, at last, I shall hear what we've been waiting for days: an explanation of what has happened, a confession, even a confession of guilt, or perhaps a justification. The final document of the "Thousand-Year Reich" should contain the real truth.

But my expectations are not fulfilled. In tones of indifference, almost mechanically, the Führer comes out with the explanations, accusations and demands that I, the German people and the whole world know already.

Monday, 30th April, 1945

In the Reichstag's interior, a few hundred metres from the Führerbunker, Soviet and German soldiers fought fiercely.

Traudl Junge: [Hitler's adjutant, Otto Günsche] comes up to me: "Come on, the Führer wants to say goodbye". I rise and go out into the corridor. I vaguely realise there are other people there too. But all I really see is the figure of the Führer. He comes very slowly out of his room, stooping more than ever,

Hitler was last seen in public when he decorated members of the Hitler Youth in April 1945.

Secretary Traudl Humps married Hans Hermann Junge in 1943. He was killed in action the following year.

stands in the open doorway and shakes hands with everyone. I feel his right hand warm in mine, he looks at me but he isn't seeing me. He says something to me, but I don't hear it. I am frozen and scarcely know what's going on around me. Only when Eva Braun comes over to me is the spell broken a little. "Please do try to get out. You may yet make your way through. And give Bavaria my love", she says, smiling but with a sob in her voice. Like that, she follows the Führer into his room – and to her death.

Erich Kempka: At the time I was in one of the lesser damaged rooms of the underground garage. Günsche rang, his voice hoarse with excitement:

"I must have 200 litres of petrol immediately". At first I thought this was a bad joke and told him it was out of the question. Now he began shouting. "Petrol – Erich! – Petrol!"

"OK, and why would you need a mere 200 litres of petrol?"

"I cannot tell you on the phone".

In great haste I authorised my deputy to take some men at once and siphon out what petrol could be found and bring it to the place ordered. Then I hurried over the rubble to Günsche to find out what had happened.

Rochus Misch: [Hitler's servant, Heinz] Linge placed his ear to the door of the anteroom. He and Günsche, opened the door and advanced slowly to Hitler's study door. Nobody drew breath. The second door was opened.

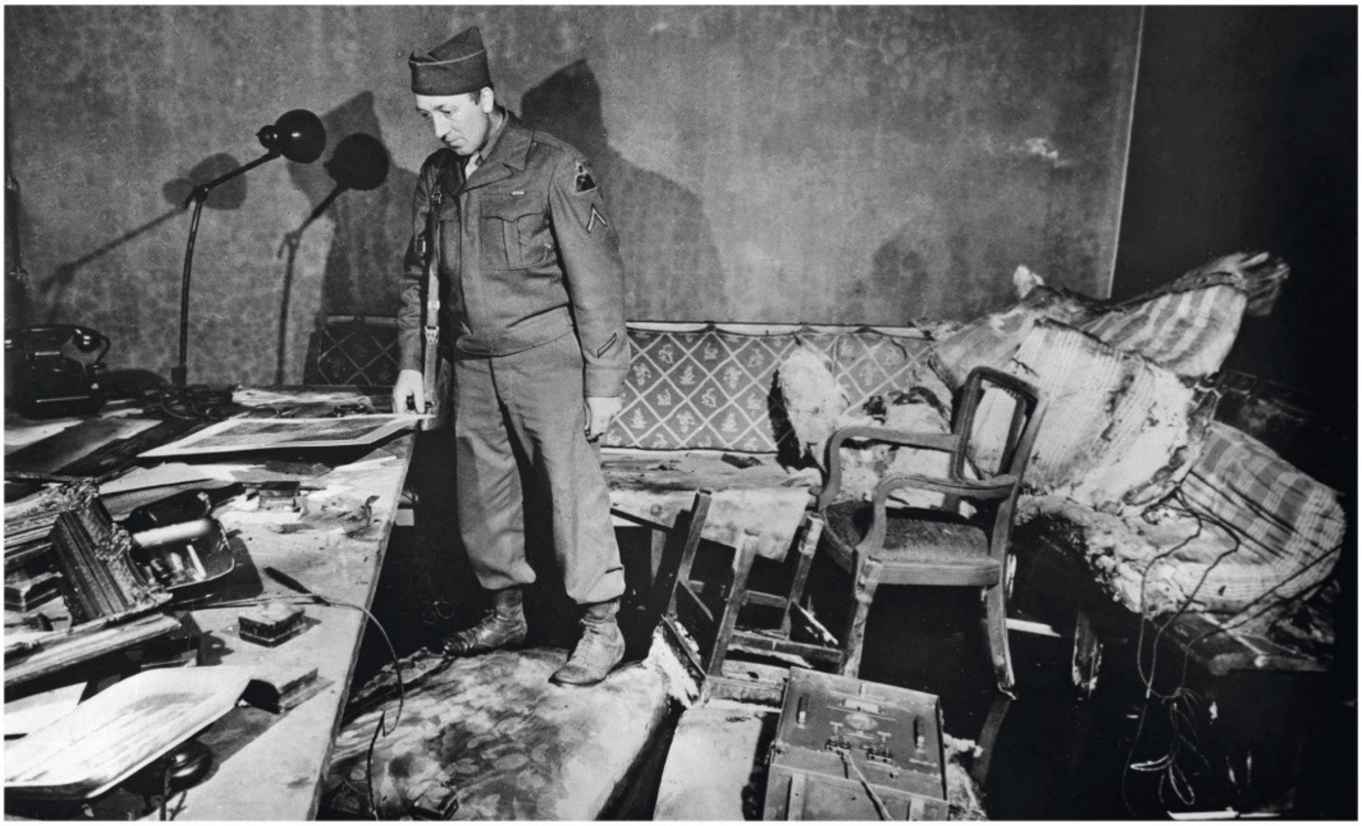
My glance fell first on Eva. She was seated with her legs drawn up, her head inclined towards Hitler. Her shoes were under the sofa. Near her – I cannot remember whether on the sofa or the armchair near it – the dead Hitler. His eyes were open and staring, his head had fallen forward slightly.

Erich Kempka: There were 20 steps up to the bunker exit. I had not reckoned with the weight and my strength failed… Halfway up Günsche hurried to assist me, and together we carried the body of Eva Hitler into the open.

Günsche and I lay Eva Hitler beside her husband. Russian shells were exploding around us – it seemed that their artillery had suddenly doubled its bombardment.

I ran back to the shelter of the bunker, panting. Then I seized a can of petrol, ran out again and placed it near the two bodies. I took off the cap of the petrol can. Shells exploded close by splattering us with earth and dust. We ran to the bunker entrance for cover. Tensely we waited for the shelling in our area to die down before pouring petrol over the corpses. Then I ran out speedily and grabbed the

Lawlessness prevailed in Berlin in April 1945, and people feared the Russian soldiers.



An American soldier in the Führerbunker. During the last days of the war, the bunkers were emptied and vandalised by Soviet soldiers. After the war, the Russians blew up the buildings to avoid Nazi memorials, and today no trace of the complex remains above ground.

canister. I was trembling as I poured the contents over the two bodies, but I was conscious of it being Hitler's last order.

How should we light the petrol? I protested at a suggestion to ignite the bodies using a hand grenade. My glance fell on a large piece of rag. It took only a second to soak the rag with petrol. "A match!" Dr. Goebbels took a box of matches from his pocket and handed it to me. I set light to the rag and once it was afire... Slowly the fire began to nibble at the corpses.

> "I dreamed of being his chauffeur and constant companion"
>
> Erich Kempka, Hitler's chauffeur

Traudl Junge: The door to Hitler's room is still open... Eva's little revolver is lying on the table with a pink chiffon scarf beside it, and I see the brass case of the poison capsule glinting on the floor... Suddenly I feel something like hatred and helpless anger rise in me. I'm angry with the dead Führer.

Rochus Misch: What now? Soon we had a consensus: negotiate with the Russians. We had to connect a line to their field telephones. Linesman Gretz appeared with a giant drum of cable, pointed to two plugs on the junction box and said: "Now I'll go over to the Russians". The Red Army was already in Zimmer-Strasse, not 400 metres away... I plugged in the cable and heard a Russian voice on the other end. "Moment, moment", I said and connected the call to General Krebs, who was fluent in Russian.

Tuesday, 1st May, 1945

Soldiers from the Red Army celebrated the capture of the Reichstag. In the Führerbunker survivors prepared to escape.

Rochus Misch: Towards five in the afternoon Frau Goebbels appeared at the telephone switchboard with her six children from the ante-bunker below. She began changing them one after the other into the same type of long white nightdress. She combed their hair and caressed the children gently. The nine-year-old Helga was crying... I knew this was the final parting of a mother's from her children.

Traudl Junge: We sit around and wait for evening. Only Schädle, the wounded leader of the escort commando, has shot himself. Krebs and Burgdorf stand up, smooth down their uniform tunics, and shake hands with everyone in farewell. They're not leaving, they're going to shoot themselves here. Goebbels walks restlessly up and down, smoking... He has stopped complaining and ranting. So the time had finally come. We all shake hands with him in farewell. He wishes me good luck, but with a twisted smile. "You may get through", he says... But I shake my head doubtfully.

Wednesday, 2nd May, 1945

Joseph and Magda Goebbels had taken the lives of their children and committed suicide. Berlin surrendered.

Rochus Misch: Long after midnight Goebbels gave me a sudden look as if he were seeing me for the first time. "The war is lost... We knew how to live, and we now we have to know how to die. I do not need you any longer, Misch".

Then he gave me his hand, something he had never done before. His handshake was firm; his fingers cold. For a moment I felt relief. I thought no more of Goebbels or Hitler. I went back to the switchboard and plucked out all the plugs.

Rumours: Hitler survived

No photos exist of Hitler's corpse, so since the end of the Third Reich in 1945 rumours have spread about the Führer's fate. Some argued that Hitler's body was saved by former Nazis – or even that the dictator did not die in Berlin, but escaped from the capital at the last minute.

MYTH

Hitler did not die

Together with Eva Braun Hitler supposedly escaped Berlin in a plane and went to Barcelona. From there he travelled on to Argentina. The myth was fuelled by none other than Josef Stalin, who – when asked by President Truman – denied that Hitler was dead, and thought he had escaped to Spain. Stalin was never convinced of Hitler's death and tortured bodyguard Rochus Misch to try to get to the "truth".

■ **Facts:** Hitler committed suicide along with Eva Braun and was burned shortly after in the Reich Chancellery's garden. This has been confirmed by numerous testimonies from people who were present.

Eva Braun chose to die alongside her partner, Adolf Hitler.

According to myth, the corpses from the Reich Chancellery were not Hitler and Eva Braun.

MYTH

Corpse still exists

Adolf Hitler's body was never burned. Instead, his dead body was recovered by faithful Nazi supporters and buried in a secret location.

■ **Facts:** after the fall of Berlin, Russian soldiers found the burned remains of two bodies in the Reich Chancellery that may have been Hitler and Eva Braun. The bones were buried in a Soviet barracks at Magdeburg. KGB chief Yuri Andropov dug up the remains and cremated them again in 1970. The ashes were scattered at a secret location near the River Elbe in order not to create a place of pilgrimage for neo-Nazis.

U-boat U-977 was taken by the US after the war and sunk as part of a military exercise.

MYTH

Führer's remains were stored in the Antarctic

According to a rumour connected to an expedition in 1939, the Nazis created a secret base in Antarctica. After the war, German submarine *U-977* sailed to Argentina, where the crew surrendered. *U-977* was reported to have been near the base in Antarctica to deliver Adolf Hitler's remains so a cloning project could take place.

■ **Facts:** The expedition in 1939 was scientific and a place was chosen to set up a German whaling station. No trace has ever been found of a German military base in Antarctica. *U-977* did sail to Argentina, but sailed direct from Norway and had no opportunity to take Hitler's ashes or any other Nazi relics aboard.

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The Japanese struck without warning
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